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21

OLIVER STONE

ON HORROR, MOVIES AND MORE

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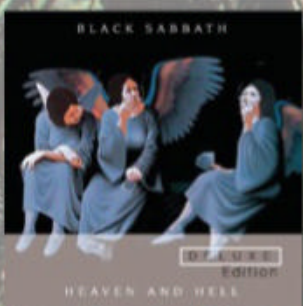
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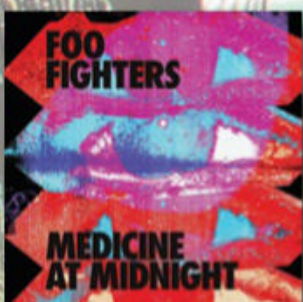
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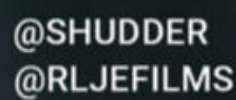
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- S**: Includes posters for "The Pale Door", "Castle Freak", "Scarecrow", and "The Mortuary Collection".
- C**: Includes posters for "The Host", "The Thing", and "Monstru".
- A**: Includes posters for "The Confession", "The Ruin", and "The So".
- R**: Includes posters for "Satan's Slaves", "The Role", and "Belze".
- Y**: Includes posters for "The Host", "The Thing", and "Monstru".



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PLUS! A look back at Stone's first feature – an oddball Canadian flick with stranger-than-fiction production woes.

by **MICHAEL DOYLE**

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On the event of our 200th issue, *Rue Morgue* brings together some of our contemporaries in genre journalism past and present – Mick Garris, Tony Timpone, Tim Lucas, Brad Miska and Kat Ellinger – to take the pulse.

PLUS! A glance at the D.I.Y. horror fanzines of yesteryear.

by **RODRIGO GUDIÑO**, **ANDREA SUBISSATI**, **ALISON LANG** and **BENOIT BLACK**

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NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND

I promised myself I wouldn't get too sappy here, weirdos. A year in lockdown is enough to make anyone dissolve into tears at something as inconsequential as a video clip of a baby goat in pyjamas, but hitting 200 issues is a mighty big deal.

In putting this landmark edition together, I had the idea of running a feature on the history of horror journalism. At first, *Rue Morgue* founder and publisher Rodrigo Gudiño was skeptical when I assigned it to him to write, so as to include his own perspective as the mad mind from which this entire magazine sprang forth. He wondered (and appropriately so) if such a story would be too "inside baseball" – does the average horror fan really care about journalism industry jibber-jabber? That's when I got to remind him that *RM* readers aren't your average horror fans. The *RM* reader has actively sought out a panel of established experts to curate their valuable viewing time, to be informed by the offbeat personalities and tastes we've painstakingly culled via our writers, to dig deeper into the subject than the blinding blitz of paid sponsorships and ads that have come to dominate social media. To serve this segment of horror fan is why we're here at all, and why we're *still* here after 200 glossy issues.

More than that, I just personally never get tired of hearing *RM*'s origin story. With so much media conceived in a boardroom as the result of crunching costs and profitability margins, I love being part of a passion project – a true creative vision. *RM* exists because someone believed it should and had the wherewithal to make it happen and see it through for more than 23 years and counting. It's only appropriate, really, when you consider that horror thrives on a similar spirit, where invention and creativity are rewarded over budgets and star power. Independence and passion are the lifeblood of our genre, and it has flowed richly throughout each of our 200 editions.

That's not to say Rodrigo hasn't given me license to do some innovating of my own; shaking things up is part of the magazine's DNA, and it's probably higher up in my job description than such unspoken imperatives as, say, wearing pants (absent from my professional rulebook since well before the pandemic, I might add). In this spirit, we bid Kaci Hansen's The Homicidal Homemaker column adieu after bestowing her great culinary gifts upon us for the past five years; if I wore pants, they'd fit more snugly thanks to her. She's got many other fishsticks to fry these days, so do keep up with her as her star continues to rise, and let's hope she remembers us after she's famous.

New to the fold is a name that's no noob to horror journalism – when the internet threatened to crush horror journalism as we know it, Stacie Ponder's Final Girl blog sprouted inexorably from the wreckage with biting horror commentary that completely changed the game. Since then, you can find her on the *Gaylords of Darkness* podcast and, as of right now, in these pages! Her new column, The Devil's in the Details, will provide a peep through the glory hole into her mind, as it fixates on horror's itchiest head-scratchers. Please join me in welcoming Stacie as *Rue Morgue*'s newest columnist, provided she survives the gruelling initiation ritual I had to put off due to the pandemic. We'll see how much of a final girl she is...

There are other little tweaks in this issue that I'll leave you to discover but now, I'll permit myself to get a wee bit sappy. If not for the fact that *RM* HQ in Toronto is still under lockdown, I'd be throwing one hell of a banger to celebrate 200 issues – the kind where the ringing in my ears lasts longer than my three-day hangover, and the *Rue Morgue* manor is left with a collection of abandoned shoes, inflatable bath toys, and mystery stains on the furniture. I've never missed gathering up crushed beer cans and lipstick-stained cigarette butts as much as I do right now, but I'm counting on you to celebrate with me – if not at the expense of your lungs and livers, then in the spirit of our shared love for the genre that keeps *Rue Morgue* alive.

Here's to you, to us, to horror! Print's not dead – long live print!



ANDREA SUBISSATI
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Horror in Culture & Entertainment

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RUE MORGUE #200 is dedicated to the memory of David G. Barnett. R.I.P.

Cover Design by Andrew Wright

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POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



HEY, YOUR MAGAZINE is freaking awesome. I just recently started my first round of a subscription, and I truly can't get enough. I even had a fun time convincing my very Christian father to send me *The Witch* issue. However, I still can't get him to send the *Hereditary* issue because the cover genuinely scares him. HAH! I need your help with that one, that was one of my favourite movies! Being incarcerated, I miss out on a lot. Rightfully so, but the realm of horror movies is one that I miss so much it hurts. So many of my favourite memories are from watching terrifying, mind-bending movies as a kid (the ending of *High Tension* still echoes through the back of my mind). Amazingly, the discovery of your magazine has helped me get plugged back in and I can't thank you enough for that opportunity.

ALEX – ADDRESS WITHHELD

I AM A HUGE fan of all things horror and I never got around to subscribing to any publication. When the time had come, I decided that there was no other magazine to subscribe to than *Rue Morgue*. It is everything I want as a horror fan. Thank you for all you do!

KYLE SPODEN, VIA EMAIL

YOUR WEBSITE IS, at best, confusing, at worst, useless. Figuring out how to subscribe is next to impossible and the fact that some items are priced in US currency and others in CAD is off-putting.

NAME WITHHELD, VIA EMAIL

We've given our site a makeover; it should be easier to navigate now. You can also try Rue Morgue's brand new app, now available on iOS and Google Play.

HELLO, JUST WANTED to give everyone at *Rue Morgue* a great big thank you for being so awesome. I especially want to give Mariam a shout-out of thanks. [She] sent me a replacement copy of issue *RM#198*, which got lost in the mail. I received the issue a week after our email correspondence and loved it as usual. For the record, *The Vigil*, which was on the cover, is a fantastic movie that I wished was a bit longer since it was so good.

KEVIN KENNEL, VIA EMAIL

SHOUT-OUT TO @RueMorgue's Mariam Bastani for resolving my Case of the Ordered Issue Gone Missing During COVID. Perhaps a diehard horror fan (or the curious) could not resist it?

@JKMORAN, VIA TWITTER

THIS IS ME with my treasured [*RM#196*] in my "man cave" attic room. I hope to read your magazine for many years to come!

JEROEN – THE NETHERLANDS



MY BIRTHDAY is quickly approaching so I decided to get myself a subscription to @RueMorgue magazine for a self-given gift. Thank you, me, for providing the best possible birthday gift. You're welcome, me, I'm glad you like it.

@FATALAMELIA, VIA TWITTER

DEAR COSMO, I mean, dear *O Magazine*, I mean, dear Andrea, why can't you just start your own magazine instead of hijacking one that I've been reading for twenty years to use as your personal soapbox? I don't give a shit what you think about politics or social issues! I read this magazine for horror in culture and entertainment. Regarding Dan R's letter, he's right about your man hate. I mean, issues dedicated to queer fear and feminist horror, but you barely said anything when

George Romero and Stuart Gordon died. You might not know, they directed a couple of horror movies. Please go away. Signed, white, racist, heterosexual, Republican, *horror fan!*

DARRIN CRIGLAR – ADDRESS WITHHELD

Y'ALL ARE THE BEST! Opening my mailbox and seeing that big white envelope with your latest issue always has me feeling like a kid on Christmas morning. Keep up the amazing work, you rockstars!

DEVIN K. HARTLEY, VIA EMAIL

I'VE BEEN READING *Rue Morgue* for the past sixteen years and subscribed for the first time this past spring. I miss getting a new issue every month [but] enjoy the bi-monthly issues. I love *Rue Morgue TV* and look forward to new episodes. Keep doing what you're doing.

SPENCER ELLIS, VIA EMAIL

LOVE JUST ABOUT everything you guys have done since the beginning. I'm probably the only one in Missouri that has most of the issues under issue #20! LOL. If I could add anything it would be more pages. Top *Scream Magazine* with like 120 pages. Even if it costs more. Us disciples of *Rue Morgue* would buy it no matter!

CODY, VIA EMAIL

I JUST SUBSCRIBED again, truly the best horror magazine out there. I love the content they stuff in [a] nicely formatted format, no regrets.

RYAN ROZUMNIAK, VIA FACEBOOK

RE: "Learn How to Make a Horror Quilt from Old T-Shirts!" on *Rue Morgue TV*—Making it as a duvet cover is a great idea! Having made a T-shirt quilt (with the batting and sewing the three layers together and the binding) years ago, doing it this way instead would have definitely saved myself and my back a lot of time and pain.

ARIEL HANSEN, VIA YOUTUBE

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POST MORTEM

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CORONER'S REPORT

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

ISSUE #
200

This past January 29, the Texas Department of Public Safety sent out three Amber Alerts seeking information on Chucky – a red-haired killer doll – that had purportedly abducted his kind-hearted “son,” Glen. The DPS later apologised, saying the alert was the result of a “test malfunction.”

A few months before he was killed in a car accident, James Dean made a driver's safety TV ad in which he said, “Drive safely; the life you save may be mine.”

Horror rock pioneer Screaming Lord Sutch holds the record for contesting the most Parliamentary elections in his native England, having stood as the leader of the Official Monster Raving Loony Party for 39 elections between 1983 and 1999.

The alarm sound heard on George A. Romero's *Day of the Dead* is the same one from John Carpenter's *The Thing*.

On September 8, 2019, 21-year-old Yulia Sharkom was trying to pull her daughter from a half-open front seat window, when the two-year-old activated the window control button and inadvertently strangled her mother to death.

Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, The Legendary Pink Dots, Morrissey, Motörhead, Eminem, Thin Lizzy, Judas Priest, LL Cool J, and Bob Dylan have all written songs about Jack the Ripper.

There are three common ways to close the mouth of a corpse – wires, sutures, or wrapping a scarf around the head to keep the jaw closed.

Composer Akira Ifukube created Godzilla's trademark roar by rubbing a contrabass with a resin-coated leather glove, and then reverberating the sound that was produced. He also created Godzilla's thunderous footsteps by beating a kettle drum with a thick rope knotted at the end.

Before shooting the first scenes with the prop map, *The Goonies* production designer J. Michael Riva thought that it didn't look old enough, so he aged it with coffee and his own blood.

Erica Marshall, a 28-year-old British veterinarian in Ocala, Florida, died in 2012 when the horse she was treating in a hyperbaric oxygen chamber kicked the wall, releasing a spark from its horseshoes, triggering an explosion.

Composer Elliot Goldenthal attributes the disturbing nature of his score for *Alien 3* to recording during the Los Angeles riots of 1992.

YouTuber Prince Midnight constructed a guitar using the skeleton of his uncle Filip, who passed away in Greece in the '90s. Midnight dubbed the guitar the “Filip Skelecaster” and uses it to play black metal, natch.

Nicolas Cage ate a real cockroach for his role in *Vampire's Kiss*. The scene took three takes.

COMPILED BY BENOIT BLACK
GOT A WEIRD STAT OR MORBID FACT?
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EXPIRING MINDS

ON RUE MORGUE'S
SOCIAL MEDIA

You can only watch one horror franchise for the rest of lockdown. What is it?

Final Destination, hands down. Nothing like dead teenagers.

MATT DI TERESA, VIA FACEBOOK

Phantasm. Eventually I will know exactly what combination of drugs to take in order for the continuity to make sense.

BRIAN PO, VIA FACEBOOK

Texas Chainsaw Massacre... makes my family seem weird compared to theirs.

NATHANIEL KOLODZIEJ, VIA FACEBOOK

Wishmaster. I don't like the whole franchise but, heck, I'd take the opportunity to check out all of them again.

CHRIS ELLIOTT, VIA FACEBOOK

The Gates of Hell trilogy from Lucio Fulci. At least the Freudsteins seem pretty settled in.

COLIN BAXTER, VIA FACEBOOK

FINAL WORDS

AS CAPTIONED BY YOU ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA



“HANDS UP, WHO LIKES SCARY MOVIES?”

THIS MONTH'S CAPTION CONTEST WINNER IS
@CATZNHORROR, VIA INSTAGRAM

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A TRIP TO AREA 51

Ask someone the first thing they think of when they hear "Area 51" and odds are they'll say "aliens." This secretive Air Force base in the American Southwest has become synonymous with government conspiracies and extraterrestrials in a way that has fully permeated pop culture. Movies such as *Independence Day* (1996) and *Area 51* (2015) name it directly while *Men in Black* (1997) and *Paul* (2011) invoke its narrative spirit through shadow organizations that deliberately hide the truth about life beyond planet Earth.

But what exactly is Area 51, and why is it so inextricably linked with little green men? Not surprisingly, it all starts with the Cold War circa the mid-1950s. President Eisenhower authorized Project Aquatone to develop planes that could fly high enough to avoid getting picked up during CIA "reconnaissance" (read: spy) missions over Soviet countries. The project needed a remote location that wasn't easily accessible to press or the general public, so the Air Force set up shop in Groom Lake, about 80 miles northwest of Las Vegas. "Area 51" is believed to be the designation given to the location on maps created by the Atomic Energy Commission.

The first plane developed at Area 51, the Lockheed U-2, could fly at altitudes of around 60,000 feet. This was tens of thousands of feet higher than any commercial or military aircraft at the time, so to see something soar that high in such remote locations naturally drew some interest. Of course, when asked, military representatives in the area couldn't reveal what they were actually developing, so they gave excuses in the vein of "natural phenomena" and "high-altitude weather research" that begged for speculation.

One such story involved a 1959 article in the *Reno Evening Gazette* about UFOs in the area, and another in the 1980s interviewed a man named Bob Lazar who claimed to have worked in Area 51, alleging that they housed a recovered alien spacecraft within. Meanwhile, the U.S. government didn't officially acknowledge Area 51's existence until 2013, when a Freedom of Information Act request about the U-2 plane project from a professor at George Washington University inadvertently declassified the site. By that point, the collective imagination around Area 51 had been allowed to run wild for decades, with pop culture filling in the blanks with all manner of alien life ranging from *Paul*'s innocuous alien stoner to *Independence Day*'s

invaders bent on world domination. And while it seems likely that the conspiracies coming out of Area 51 are of the more mundane variety, it can also be said that the powers that be haven't really done a whole lot to earn the benefit of the doubt when it comes to refuting claims of extraterrestrial sightings. So keep watching those skies; the truth is out there!

BRYAN CHRISTOPHER



CASE MISSING FOUND

BILLY REDDEN

DELIVERANCE'S "Banjo Boy"

Early in 1972's *Deliverance* there's a classic scene in which city slicker Drew (Ronnie Cox) engages in a banjo duel with a backwoods mountain boy before his canoe trip turns deadly. The boy was played by Billy Redden, now 56, a Georgia native who didn't actually play the banjo for the scene (a real player's arms were wrapped around him). The role defined him, however, and he was cast as a banjo player three more times; in Tim Burton's *Big Fish* (2003), the *Blue Collar* TV comedy sketch show, and 2009's *Outrage: Born in Terror*. Redden also appeared in Lamberto

Bava's 1984 film *Blastfighter* and in the 2012 documentary to mark the 40th anniversary of his breakout film, *The Deliverance of Rabun County*.

Redden lives in Dillard, Georgia, works at a Walmart, and says he struggles to make ends meet.

ANDREA SUBISSATI



NEEDFUL THINGS



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Widowwitchlashes.com

2 CHILD’S PLAY FANDAGES

\$7.99 USD

Even if you’re one of the Good Guys, cuts are bound to happen when you play with sharp objects! Keep your wounds cleaner than your mouth with these collectible “fandages,” featuring five unique designs from your favourite killer doll flick. Now available for pre-order.

Entertainmentearth.com

3 CHEDDAR GOBLIN JIGSAW PUZZLE

\$13 USD

Among the many delights on offer in Panos Cosmatos’ 2018 film *Mandy*, the cheddar goblin who barfs macaroni on some delighted children is our personal fave. Mondo and Legion M have collaborated on a 252-piece puzzle of the infamous scene, while the reverse side of the 11x16-inch design is a pure mac-and-cheese challenge for the more adventurous puzzler.

Mondoshop.com

4 NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET HARDCOVER JOURNAL

\$9.99 USD

One, two, here’s a notebook for you! Put those sleepless nights to good use by jotting down your killer one-liners in this *Nightmare on Elm Street* journal. With 96 lined interior sheets, a back pocket, and a ribbon bookmark, it’s a dream come true for those who just... can’t... get... to... sleep.

Notjusttoyz.com

5 PENNYWISE CHIA PET

\$24.99 USD

Bring the circus to your home with these handmade decorative planters featuring Pennywise’s screeching visage. Now you can grow this dancing clown some tufty green hair and shape it to your heart’s delight! Bonus: seeds included reach full growth in a week or two, so you won’t have to wait another 27 years to be satisfied.

Classichorrorshop.com





CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES

MONKEY BONES MASK

Tattooer-turned mask-maker Mike Guidone has been collecting masks and horror toys all his life.

"Monster-making has also always been in the back of my head," he says, "but it wasn't until four years ago that I decided to buy a mask-maker kit to see what I could do and, to be honest, I couldn't believe I was pulling it off and rather decently."

Guidone's Monkey Bones Mask design is a case in point: original and memorable, it features hypnotic neon eyes that stare deep into the caverns of your soul.

INSPIRATION

"I own a little tattoo shop in Beavercreek, Ohio, called Monkey-Bones Tattoos and I made this mask from the logo, which was also inspired from my old skateboarding days and the Powell Peralta Rat Bones graffiti logo. The paint job I was trying to go for was a blue glow coming from the eyes without involving blue lights. You'll see that throughout my masks. This was my third sculpt once adventuring into the mask-making world four years ago."

MATERIALS

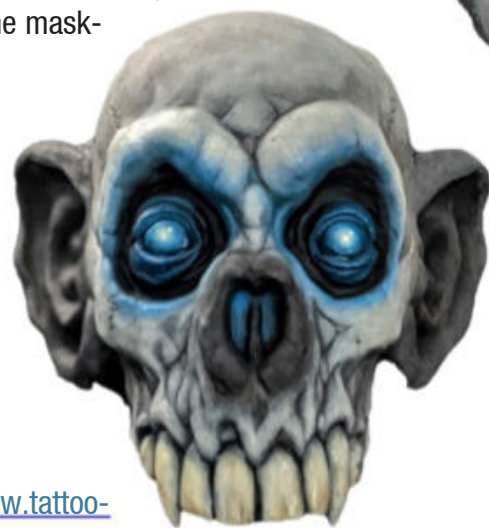
An assortment of materials, including WED clay, Hydrocal, latex, and inks.

PRICE

\$200 USD.

FIND IT

Instagram [@mike.guidone](#) and [www.tattoo-monkeybones.com](#).



CHRIS HAMMOND

VINTAGE AND CLASSIC

MONSTER MANIA

Renaissance Productions, 1966-67

One of the many horror-themed magazines to debut during the 1960s, the short-lived (just three issues) *Monster Mania* stood apart from its competitors in that it took a serious look at genre films of the day. Co-publisher and editor Russ Jones (who had previously created the comics magazine *Creepy*) avoided the puns and jokey prose of other monster movie publications and presented readers with thoughtful, well-written offerings, illustrated with rarely seen B&W photos.

Dated October 1966, Issue #1 offered a spotlight on makeup legend Jack Pierce and Ham-

mer's *Dracula*, *Prince of Darkness*, and *The Reptile*. Issue #2 (January 1967) has a cover by Frank Frazetta and articles on director Terence Fisher, Christopher Lee, and Peter Cushing. The final issue (April 1967) featured *Frankenstein Created Woman* and *The Wolf Man*.

All three issues can be found on eBay. Prices vary widely, depending on the issue and condition (issue 3 is the most readily available), but can usually be picked up for around \$10 for well-read copies, and up to \$100 for a mint, unread specimen.

JAMES BURRELL

MORE CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES AT RUE-MORGUE.COM



RUE MORGUE TALKS TO ONE OF HOLLYWOOD'S MOST CONTROVERSIAL AUTEURS, OLIVER STONE, ABOUT THE OFT-OVERLOOKED HORROR FILMS THAT LAUNCHED HIS CAREER

ROOTS OF HORROR

BY MICHAEL DOYLE

FOR NEARLY FIVE DECADES, OLIVER STONE HAS CULTIVATED A REPUTATION AS THE PROVOCATEUR PAR EXCELLENCE. ONCE LABELLED "THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN IN AMERICA" BY THE *L.A. TIMES*, THE VIETNAM VETERAN IS AMONG THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL FIGURES TO HAVE EMERGED DURING NEW HOLLYWOOD. Winner of three

Academy Awards (two for Best Director), no other filmmaker of his generation has inspired such equally prodigious levels of acclaim and revulsion. Uncompromising works such as *Platoon*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *JFK*, *Natural Born Killers* and *Nixon* have cemented his standing as a socio-politically charged moviemaker of the first rank, one who is unafraid to pick at America's most painful scabs. Less well known is the fact that [Stone](#) commenced his directorial career with two horror films: [Seizure](#) in 1974 (see sidebar) and 1981's [The Hand](#).

Adapted from Marc Brandel's novel *The Lizard's Tail* (1979), *The Hand* follows Jonathan Lansdale ([Michael Caine](#)), a controlling comic strip illustrator who loses his drawing hand in a freak auto accident. Forced to wear a prosthetic limb, and with his career and marriage to Anne ([Andrea Marcovici](#)) crumbling, he is beset by disturbing blackouts and hallucinations involving his detached body part. Convinced the hand has taken on a murderous life of its own, Lansdale finally resolves to confront the autonomous appendage before it threatens to destroy both him and his family.

A critical success, *The Hand* proved a box-office disaster, earning \$566,736 during its opening weekend against a \$6.5 million budget. Just three years after collecting his first Oscar for penning *Midnight Express*, its failure imperilled Stone's career ambitions. *Rue Morgue* recently cornered the 74-year-old and invited him to finally come to grips with his much-maligned monster movie (out on Blu-ray from [Scream Factory](#) on May 25) and examine both its – and the filmmaker's own – troubled history.



I thought we would begin by discussing the – [Interrupting] Please, Michael, before we start, I should tell you the reason why I'm late for our interview. It's because the strangest thing happened and I needed some time to comprehend it. I don't think you'll believe me, but I was just taking a shower and one of the handles suddenly changed shape on me and took a firm grip on my hand. Naturally, I was very scared by this. I couldn't believe it. It was like a flashback or something. I said, "My God, this must have something to do with Michael Doyle calling and the fact we're speaking today!"

I often have that effect on people.

I'm sure that's true. By the way, I looked at *The Hand* for the first time in several years the other night in order to be ready for you. It brought back a lot of memories. I showed the film to my wife and daughter, and both of them were scared shitless by it. Frankly, I was pretty fucking scared myself. I couldn't believe my response to it. It was fascinating, actually, and quite unexpected. It's like you don't ever realise it when you're making a film, because you get so deeply involved in the process. You are constantly asking yourself, "Is this working?" All that crap comes in and all you can think about is the audience. But, man, I was utterly *chilled* by it.

Seven years before The Hand, you began your career as a writer/director with another horror film, Seizure, one that some have attempted to scrub from your resumé. What's interesting is that The Hand followed the path of Seizure, where you have an artist being terrorized by metaphysical forces that correspond with his own psychological turmoil.

They're both the *same* story, but I didn't do that deliberately. In *The Lizard's Tail*, Jon Lansdale is also an illustrator and I optioned Marc Brandel's novel without ever making a conscious connection between it and my first film. Jonathan Frid, who was the star of *Dark Shadows*, played the artist in *Seizure*, a man that is really a coward. The horrors are revealed to be a dream, and he dies from his dream of a heart attack – that's why it's called *Seizure*. Frid did a good job of conveying all that and his performance was in the style Michael Caine later adopted in *The Hand*: understated, thoughtful, haunted. There's also a self-destructive aspect to both characters that connects them. *Seizure* had been released on a double bill by Cinerama and was unsuccessful. It didn't do anything for my career. I walked away from it; I was so ashamed of the film. To then go out and do the same story again with *The Hand* – and not be aware of it – is remarkable. Like Lansdale, I must have been having blackouts, because that doesn't happen very often in a career: that you remake a film without ever knowing it. It took me years to make that realization.



“THE MOST IMPORTANT TRAIT ONE NEEDS TO BE A GREAT HORROR DIRECTOR IS THE DESIRE TO GO ALL THE WAY AND MERCILESSLY DRIVE THAT NAIL INTO THE THIRD EYE. YOU’VE GOT TO BE A SADIST AND WANT TO KILL THE AUDIENCE...”
– OLIVER STONE



***Hand Of Death:** Oliver Stone’s lesser-known 1981 horror film underperformed at the box office but pleased audiences while inspiring Sam Raimi for the severed-hand hijinks in *Evil Dead II*.*

When you read *The Lizard’s Tail*, did you immediately have an idea of how you would adapt it as a movie?

Yes, although that approach was challenged throughout the process of making the film. It was my agent who brought the novel to my attention. Marc Brandel was unknown to me, but I recognised that he’d written a tense psychological thriller about this needy guy losing it over his wife and not perceiving his own paranoia and malevolence. Marc had gone through a divorce, and was rather bitter about it, and he put all those complex feelings into the book. For

that reason, my first notion was to make something psychologically devastating like *Repulsion*. But then we made the mistake of calling it *The Hand* instead of *The Lizard’s Tail*. We didn’t retain Brandel’s title simply because it wasn’t a great title, certainly not commercially. We have a different audience in America – they always want something bigger – and *The Hand* sounded more commercial. Once we settled on that title, the studio was like, “Okay, we must see *more* of the hand! Give us the hand!” That decision made it harder for me to follow the model of *Repulsion*, telling a story that existed within a person’s

damaged perspective, as it then became all about the hand rather than the mind. I felt if we did it my way I’d be playing to my strengths, as I’m more of a psychological film director than a horror film director.

You once claimed you didn’t have “the right stuff” to be a director of horror films. I’m curious to know what you believe you lack that somebody like John Carpenter or George Romero possesses.

The kill instinct! The most important trait one needs to be a great horror director is the desire to go all the way and mercilessly drive that nail into the third eye. You’ve got to be a sadist and want to kill the audience, make them fucking shrink in terror, so that they’re left wondering what’s going to happen next. During that period, the early 1980s, horror movies got extremely vicious and visceral – more than at any time before. I would argue this was due to Carpenter and others who were working in the genre, pushing the limits of what was acceptable and making some very disturbing films. In a sense, I was making more of an old-fashioned horror film with *The Hand*, just as *Seizure* had been rather quaint, although there are disturbing and visceral things in *The Hand*. I particularly like the strangeness of quieter moments like when the shower handle comes to life, or when Lansdale is being stalked by something in the field after he returns to the scene of his accident, or when he learns the artwork of his replacement has been destroyed. For me, the film is even spookier at the beginning, before the murders start happening. In other words, I think the murders stack up a little too fast for my taste now, but I love the whole aura of menace those early sections create. Then you have more dramatic scenes later, like the frightening battle Lansdale has in the garage with the hand. My God, what a fight that is!

*Sam Raimi must have watched your film as there is a suspiciously similar sequence in *Evil Dead II* in which Bruce Campbell battles his own disembodied hand.*

I know Sam a little bit and he told me he saw *The Hand*. If *Evil Dead II* is a rip-off, he should give me credit! [Laughs] That was a painful sequence to shoot, actually. We had Carlo Rambaldi doing our hand effects and he didn’t have enough space inside the hand itself to install a lot of complex mechanics. His instrumentation was very delicate, and so much time went into achieving those effects. Carlo created between thirty and forty different versions of the hand for various scenes. Some were simple glove puppets, or hands like the one Caine bites, others were intricate apparatus. All kinds of movements were required of them: walking, crawling, grabbing, strangling. For instance, during the garage showdown, there’s that great moment where the hand scuttles up Caine’s pants heading for his balls. That was fucking creepy! I also love the

OLIVER STONE LOOKS BACK ON HIS FIRST FEATURE — AN ODDBALL CANADIAN FLICK WITH STRANGER-THAN-FICTION PRODUCTION WOES

SUFFERING SEIZURE

BY MICHAEL DOYLE

A COMMON TENDENCY AMONG SEASONED ARTISTS PRESSED INTO DISCUSSING THEIR DEBUT WORKS IS ONE OF SELF-FLAGELLATION. Question Oliver Stone with sufficient rigour about *Seizure* and not even a reference to Bosley Crowther's infamous dismissal of Hitchcock's *Psycho* ("a blot on an otherwise honourable career") can entice him into consigning his maiden effort to some gloomy vestibule of Hell.

"I know all about residual shame, though," he concedes disarmingly.

Written when Stone was 27 and toiling as a cab driver and Xerox messenger, *Seizure* is an overwrought tale freighted with dread that revolves around horror author Edmund Blackstone (*Dark Shadows* mainstay [Jonathan Frid](#)), tormented by three sinister figures that inhabit his nightmares as well as his fiction: a knife-wielding dwarf ([Hervé Villechaize](#)), a hulking executioner ([Henry Judd Baker](#)), and the enigmatic Queen of Evil ([Martine Beswick](#) of *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* fame). The fledgling director's efforts to secure investors for the project, after exhausting his own finances, led him to the door of Toronto's Astral Bellevue Pathé.

"Basically, three of us ventured up to Canada, two novice producers and myself, only to get conned by these guys there who were frankly unbelievable," he recalls with a tremor of indignation. "We bounced around with very little money, *Seizure* finally coming in at a total cost of about \$160,000. Despite that, we managed to assemble a fascinating cast and filmed for five or six weeks. The actors were all living in the same house where we were shooting, which was a mistake I vowed never to repeat. That situation created a lot of tension and acrimony on the set."

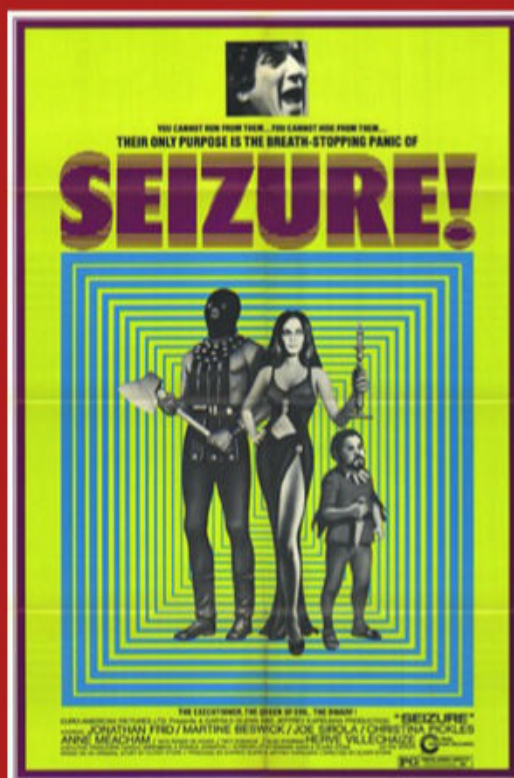
Just how strained things became after production commenced at locations in Val-Morin and Laurentides, Quebec, during the fall of 1973, is astonishing.

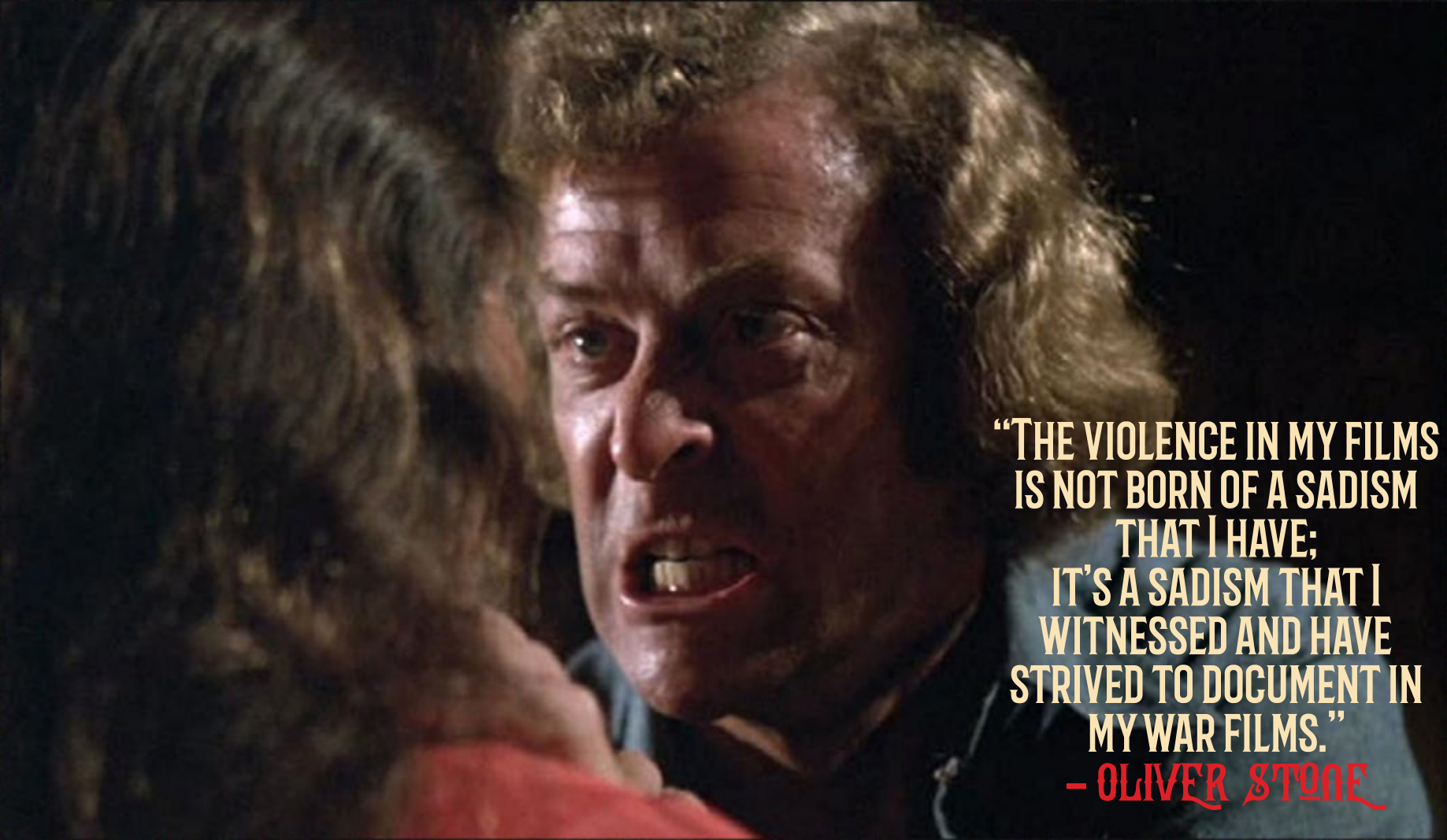
"I had a month-long affair with the leading lady, Martine Beswick," admits Stone, who was married to his first wife at the time. "Our special effects man on the film, who was in love with her, was at one point literally chasing me around with a machete! Then we had the equally crazy Hervé Villechaize playing this evil dwarf. One cold night, Hervé nearly died alone from hypothermia after he got stuck in this hole near the lake where we had been working. Somebody heard this strange buzzing-like sound coming out of the darkness, 'Neeee-neeee-neh-neh-neeee,' and followed it. They came upon Hervé, realized it was his *voice*, and saved his life."

Other events that occurred included disgruntled crew tying up the producers and rowing them out to the lake over a pay dispute, Villechaize locking himself in a cupboard (again over money), and Stone stealing *Seizure*'s answer print from the film lab before fleeing Canada with it. These crises inspired him to write *Horror Movie*, a little-known project rumoured to be a self-reflexive paean to the genre years ahead of the postmodern likes of *Scream*.

"You're giving it much more significance than it perhaps deserves," he insists. "*Horror Movie* was a screenplay I wrote rather quickly back in the dark days when I was struggling. In fact, it was one of twelve scripts I wrote during that troubled period. It was actually about the making of *Seizure*, because that experience was so utterly insane. No, it was *beyond* insane! *Horror Movie* was an attempt to capture the unique insanity of that first filmmaking experience. As such, it was really a comedy rather than some prophetic or ironic horror film."

In a year that has seen a global pandemic decimate his industry, and a bitter U.S. election polarize his nation, Stone suddenly puts his cinematic setbacks into perspective. "Nobody died, right? Still, some of us came pretty close to it!"





**"THE VIOLENCE IN MY FILMS
IS NOT BORN OF A SADISM
THAT I HAVE;
IT'S A SADISM THAT I
WITNESSED AND HAVE
STRIVED TO DOCUMENT IN
MY WAR FILMS."
— OLIVER STONE**



Long Hand: The film required between 30 and 40 different versions of the severed hand to shoot its sequences, many of which were packed with intricate mechanisms.

shot where Caine stabs the hand with a knife and the blade causes the car tire to explode.

The violence in The Hand has a surreal quality when compared with the way you later depicted the harrowing realities of war in films such as Platoon and Born on the Fourth of July.

Well, it's the fantasy element that separates them. A horror film is often a work of fiction — even when it expresses certain truthful aspects of human behaviour like in *The Hand*, it can be somewhat removed and dreamlike. When I made *Platoon*, I felt I had an obligation to what I had actually seen in Vietnam, the destructive reality of violence. I didn't see it as gratuitous bloodshed but something that was justified. Now, when you look at the films of certain directors, there's clearly sadism apparent. In Hitchcock, the way he talks, the way he thinks, sadism is often present, and there's a sadism in Polanski, too. Certainly there's a sadism in De Palma, whom I worked with on *Scarface*, and possibly in Carpenter, too. They all want to torture the audience to some degree. I'm not saying they're evil people but, again, you need that sadistic quality. The violence in my films is not born of a sadism that I have; it's a sadism that I witnessed and have strived to document in my war films. It's in my crime films, too — it's in *Natural Born Killers*, *U Turn* and *Savages*. I mean, violence is definitely in my life because I've seen too much of it up close, so I don't like to fake it in my movies. The one exception is *Natural Born Killers* as that was not done to be reality; that was done as satire.



One scene in The Hand that remains a tough watch is when Lansdale spectacularly loses his hand in a car accident.

That was another difficult scene to do. Quite apart from all the technical considerations involved, it was a situation where everybody kept double-questioning me. I finally got through all that and made it work. We shot the accident in one of the beautiful valleys outside Los Angeles. Myself, [cinematographer] King Baggot, our stunt guy Billy Hank Hooker, and the special effects people, approached it methodically. It was an ambitious thing for a neophyte director to attempt, because you are literally putting yourself in a big hole if it goes wrong. We had to spend a *lot* of time preparing the mechanics of it, time that should ideally be spent on doing your story. The schedule on *The Hand* was between 37 and 40 days, so it was a killer having to use up three days shooting the accident – but that’s what we did. I look at the scene now and it’s impressive and shocking. I like what the actors do very much; I like the timing and impact of it. The tension and action builds effectively to the moment when Lansdale’s hand is severed and he staggers out of the car, followed by the delicious touch of having all that red blood spouting from his stump and spattering against a pristine white fence.

You have been criticized in the past – I certainly have!

– for your treatment of female characters, with one critic suggesting they serve merely as “deceitful” or “needy obstacles” for the protagonist. The characters of Anne and Stella

in The Hand have been labelled as such. How do you respond to that charge?

I’ve had that criticism thrown at me for 50 years it seems. The film was merely maintaining the unity of the book, and it’s what Brandel wrote. I’d argue that Anne is very human and I do understand her dilemma. She is married to an older man, a bullying and overbearing man in the way he seeks to control her, and she is a loving mother to their daughter. It’s certainly not the right marriage for her and you do feel that she needs a solid and sympathetic partner. Anne knows her relationship with Lansdale is not working and I side with her, as she doesn’t do anything that I find to be wrong or contrary. In fact, Anne is like a female liberal of that time, or whatever you want to call it. I find the character of Stella to also be true, as she is so profoundly real. Annie McEnroe understood who she was playing, as she had grown up in Colorado and knows that rather gloomy small-town world where people go to college just to do nothing. Apparently, Brandel did a teaching stint out there in one of those college towns and encountered these same aimless people in his classes. It’s such a depressing environment and Stella rightly wants to escape from it. So, I thought *The Hand* was an evolved movie for those reasons.

To me there seems to be a discernible sense of anger in The Hand, as there is in many of your other films.

Oh, yeah. Absolutely! That’s something I have come to recognise in my work.

What is the source of it?

The source of the rage? That’s a very good ques-

tion. As one gets older, that sense of anger gradually mellows and recedes because it has to. What happens over the years is you begin to exorcise things from your psyche. There was anger in me before I went to Vietnam, but certainly the Vietnam War contributed greatly – without my quite knowing it – to my growing fury, because it was just so wrong and so devastating. The awareness of it not being what it was [purported to be] took some time to accept. Over time, one develops knowledge, not only about oneself, but about one’s country, its history and politics. I was raised conservative, politically I was raised as a Republican, but then that changed, and a deep anger set in when I realised how – do you want me to say it straight? – how fucked up American society became after World War II! How fucked up we’ve been by all this National Security bullshit! I won’t go down that road, but that manifests continually in our lives and is ruining our country on a level that still makes me very angry. It’s going on in the streets as we speak. There’s a lot of anger here and it’s threatening America. It’s in my films, you’ll see it again and again, and I’ve used my work to purge these emotions as I’ve gone along in my life. For me, the rage is no longer in there, except that it exists now as an abstract anger about my nation’s foreign and domestic police policies.

By your own admission, you were once a “wild man” and had issues with excessive cocaine use. Could it be that on some subconscious or superficial level you were attracted to Brandel’s book because it follows a character that is losing control of his life?

No. In fact, I’d say it was the opposite. I partied



The Stone Zone: Both *Seizure* and *The Hand* share themes of an artist tormented by circumstances out of his control, which parallel Stone's own early career in Hollywood.

to forget, to provide a diversion, to have fun, so I was embracing a state of playfulness and distraction. If anything, I don't want to be like those types of people. There is a lot of fear in Brandel's book, the fear of isolation, fear of the loss of control, and of course the fear of losing one's sanity is an alarming prospect. Those ideas and themes disturbed me privately, but they excited me as a filmmaker. I think there are things in our past, in all of us, that we don't know, and they come back to get you. I was talking about my Vietnam experience and the veterans, and things happen that you try to bury. You eventually have to deal with who you are, what you've become, but not everybody can. Bruce McGill's line to Caine in the bar is very telling: "You never know who you are." For me, *The Hand* operates in a straight line and it really does work as an intense and moody character study.

Why, then, has there been reluctance on your part to discuss *The Hand* in interviews?

Shame! You must understand I did not have any power. Discounting *Seizure*, as it's not in the same category, I was a first-time writer/director in Hollywood on *The Hand*. The pressure I felt was enormous, relentless, unnecessary, and stupid. In the end, it totally demoralized me,

made me feel like shit. There was also this whole stink about *Midnight Express* having been such a controversial success. I'd won an Oscar and was very hot, but there was this contravening feeling like, "Stone is too hard to handle, he's too violent and bloodthirsty," all that crap. That level of negativity kicks in and it starts to affect your psyche.



Despite having no control over *The Hand*, I went all the way with it. I finished editing the film and fought like a dog for everything in it. I did not back down. It was simply a fight I couldn't win. Orion surrounded me with certain people on my crew – like an editor I didn't get along with – and it proved debilitating. Again, humiliation was the inevitable and overwhelming emotion I felt for a long time afterwards. Then, when I saw the film again the other night, I was like, "What the hell is wrong with it? This is an interesting fucking movie! This director did a good job!"

For all that, you did enjoy a triumphant return with *Salvador* and *Platoon*.

Yeah, but it took me a long time, you know? It took me four fucking years to get back and direct another film, and even then they wouldn't support me. The only reason I recovered from *The Hand* with *Salvador* and *Platoon* was because of an English company called Hemdale, run by John Daly. He's the only reason, because I would never have survived in Hollywood otherwise. I never could have made it back. Believe me, they were ruthless motherfuckers back in those days. When you have a bad experience like *The Hand*, one that isn't exactly a fair failure, it can hurt you deeply, irreparably. 🗿

ON THE EVENT OF OUR 200TH ISSUE, *RUE MORGUE* BRINGS TOGETHER SOME OF OUR CONTEMPORARIES IN GENRE JOURNALISM PAST AND PRESENT – MICK GARRIS, TONY TIMPONE, TIM LUCAS, BRAD MISKA AND KAT ELLINGER – TO TAKE THE PULSE

HORROR BUSINESS

BY RODRIGO GUDIÑO AND ANDREA SUBISSATI

IT WAS THE LATE SUMMER OF 1997 AND I WAS HARD AT WORK PUTTING *RUE MORGUE*'S DEBUT ISSUE TOGETHER. I had grown up on paper and ink magazines – [Famous Monsters of Filmland](#), [Cinefantastique](#), [Fangoria](#), [Deep Red](#), [Video Watchdog](#) – and it was from this bedrock that I was struggling to erect what I hoped would be a new standard for genre journalism. Little did I know just how much the media landscape would change in the ensuing years and decades; that a veritable technological bombshell would drop, dismantling so many established names and outlets and overturning our understanding of what a horror magazine is supposed to be.

Back in those early days, however, I wasn't entertaining such existential questions. From features

with glossy photos and exclusive interviews to the little ads in the back, *Rue Morgue* knew exactly what it was from the start: a collectible grimoire that detailed the evolution of horror in culture and entertainment from its earliest beginnings to the present day. Such was our mandate. And yet this was no academic journal, but a polished, colourful magazine that fans could interact with and hopefully learn something from. At the time when I was putting the finishing touches on *Rue Morgue*'s premiere issue, North American horror was represented by *Fangoria*, a print genre staple active since 1979 that continues to this day despite a rocky past few decades. Through its revolving door of editors and owners, *Fango*'s long-time editor [Tony Timpone](#) continues



THE RUE MORGUE HOUSE OF HORROR

to be the person most associated with the brand and remains active in expanding the company's efforts into film and television.

Not surprisingly perhaps, his outlook on what *Fangoria* is at its core does not deviate much from what I had in mind all those years ago.

"We serve as curators of the genre," Timpone affirms simply. "It is the job of horror journalists and editors to cut through the crap and shine a light on the horror worthy of our attention... to be a trusted source."

Filmmaker Mick Garris (*The Stand*, *Sleepwalkers*) would also agree. Garris had his roots as a freelance critic, notably for *Cinefantastique* and *Fangoria*'s sister publication *Starlog* through the 1970s, prior to launching the Los Angeles cable access show *Fantasy Film Festival*, in which he interviewed heavyweights of the horror business. Recently, he returned to genre journalism with the podcast *Post Mortem With Mick Garris*. He echoes Timpone in his understanding of what horror journalists should do, which for him is to bring "knowledge, as well as an ability to convey in words the excitement that translates what films and filmmakers have to say. A true journalist brings historical perspective into the mix, hopefully with an education in the cinematic (or literary) past."

Be that as it may, the early days of *Rue Morgue* were a different cultural landscape. The power of the world wide web had yet to be harnessed and social networks were not even a dream; print and paper still held the keys to the kingdom. Even so, the appeal of horror was relatively limited. During *Rue Morgue*'s formative years, it became clear that many industry people viewed horror as just a few tiers above pornography, and magazines bore the brunt of that prejudice. *Rue Morgue*'s Sex and Horror Special Issue, released in 2000, was a perfect example; in it, we explored the fringes of taboo, from the films of Lloyd Kaufman and Jess Franco to blood and skin sinema and softcore erotica themed around popular horror films. Unfortunately, the issue did not go over well with advertisers, and the result was that we suffered a major advertising boycott from some of the biggest movie distributors across the country. We were barely on our third year and it hurt, but we weren't the only ones.

"Back in the day," concurs Timpone, "a few potential advertisers were turned off by some of the gruesome images in the mag. Walmart would never carry *Fango* on its shelves."

Other players in the business, such as *Video Watchdog*'s Tim Lucas, decided to sidestep those problems altogether by hoping to recoup



The Horror! *Fangoria*'s former editor-in-chief Tony Timpone with *Friday the 13th* creator Sean S. Cunningham, and (next page) Tim and Donna Lucas of *Video Watchdog*.

lost advertising dollars elsewhere, but the strategy could only hold so long.

"We deliberately discouraged advertisers for the first 25 years or so of publishing *Video Watchdog*," he says. "By the time we seriously needed advertising to sustain us, only Warner Archive cared to place ads with us. It wasn't enough, so we had to stop."

As the world turned the corner on a new millennium, the internet rose like a tsunami that would shake the very roots of every existing media form in its path: movies, music, newspapers, magazines. All of us in journalism experienced the same thing, but none more ardently than the oldest brands who had built

their empires with brick and mortar. Innovation became a matter of survival for this new media landscape.

"The internet killed a great chunk of newsstand magazines, cut into our circulation, hurt our ad sales, and lowered the standards of genre journalism," agrees Timpone, noting that the change brought new opportunities as well. "On the plus side, the magazine's website created a new audience and was/is helpful in promoting the brand to millions more around the world than the magazine ever could. The magazine was forced to evolve from a news source to something more specialized and retrospective friendly."

Some weren't so lucky, however. *Video Watchdog*, launched in 1990, had a formidable publishing run of 27 years, and was dedicated exclusively to the idea that films deserved to be seen the way their directors intended them to be seen – free of censorship, studio and distributor interference. As such, the advent of the Internet had more complex implications for the brand.

"The internet was a godsend," says Lucas, "in the sense that it made sharing and trading of films, in different versions from different countries – indeed rare films in general – easier to access and it also helped to eliminate the monetization of such things which existed before, and had to, to cover postage and blank cassettes and other expenses. This was long before DVD and Blu-ray box sets were a thing; our coverage pointed in that direction and inspired a lot of people who went into the home video business.

"At the same time, the internet hurt our business – as it hurt all magazines – because anyone with an interest in such material could write about it online, and the thirst for information (I won't say knowledge) was such that immediacy became more important to people than literacy, accuracy, something that passed through different hands before being committed to public view. It became more important to be first."

The sad truth was that the sharper blade of the internet's double-edged sword was the blurring of journalistic standards, the very thing that had put print magazines on the map as authoritative voices in the first place. To make matters worse, it became evident that readers did not consume online material the same way they read words on paper. As Lucas points out: "The limitless options that the internet offered trained readers to absorb information at a glance, without reading closely or with much retention." This small but significant difference in reader behaviour would contribute to our understanding of how to stay aloft in this new climate, eventually swinging the pendulum back to paper and ink, but our real test was yet to come.

WILD, WILD WEB

Like *Fangoria* and other brands, *Rue Morgue* struggled to adapt to the new reality created by the internet, which made it difficult to release content with the same impact as before. Horror news websites popped up everywhere, vying for audiences in a cutthroat race to run a high volume of content and grab the most eyeballs first. In those Wild West days of the world wide web, the competition was bloody and life for many an upstart site was nasty, brutish, and short.

But gradually, over time, the victors emerged, among them [Bloody Disgusting](#), which currently holds a pre-eminent place as the net's go-to place for horror news. The irony is that Brad Miska, who founded the site in 2001, turned his brand into a success story by using the wide reach of the internet to his advantage, and hiring

"THE INTERNET HURT OUR BUSINESS – AS IT HURT ALL MAGAZINES – BECAUSE ANYONE WITH AN INTEREST IN SUCH MATERIAL COULD WRITE ABOUT IT ONLINE... IT BECAME MORE IMPORTANT TO BE FIRST."

– TIM LUCAS, VIDEO WATCHDOG



EVER SINCE THEIR GOLDEN AGE IN THE 1980s, D.I.Y. HORROR FANZINES HAVE PROVIDED A GLIMPSE INTO HORROR'S UNDERGROUND MARGINS, BECOMING A SMALL BUT MIGHTY GLOBAL NETWORK

PAPER CUTS

BY ALISON LANG

ZINE CULTURE HAS EXPERIENCED A RICH RE-SURGENCE IN RECENT YEARS. Much like the revival of VHS and vinyl collecting, cut-and-paste zinemaking is part of a return to physical media, honouring our collective nostalgia for the pleasures of handmade objects and the communities forged through creation and trading. At their best, zines are purely D.I.Y. (do it yourself); they're open to anyone and everyone.

John Szpunar, editor of the authoritative tome *Xeroxferox: The Wild World of the Horror Film Fanzine* (2013), fondly remembers the horror zine that changed his life. It was the late '80s and he was a teenager browsing the shelves of his local comic book shop. Among the back issues of *Fangoria*, he stumbled across a copy of *Deep Red* – an irreverent, give-no-fucks zine written, edited, and designed by ex-hippie turned horror obsessive Chas Balun.

Balun, who died in 2009, was a writer for *Fangoria* and while *Deep Red* shared its glossy aesthetic, the zine's style was singular: writers with bold attitudes and eclectic tastes, covering everything from then-obscure *giallo* films to movies like *Pieces* or *Last House on Dead End Street*. For Szpunar and other horror fans who were bored of the way mainstream glossies lavished praise on the same big-budget slasher franchises, *Deep Red* opened up a wild and uncharted new world of horror and exploitation cinema.

"Reading *Deep Red* was the greatest experience in the world," Szpunar recalls. "[Balun] spoke directly to you. You felt like you were part of the club. He'd be like: 'Friday the 13th Part 7 sucks. But you gotta check out Dario Argento.' And I did! His enthusiasm was infectious."



Deep Red was part of the golden age of horror zines in the late '80s and '90s that created a small but mighty global network. With lurid titles such as *Sleazoid Express*, *Gore Gazette*, *Confessions of a Trash Fiend*, *European Trash Cinema* or *Scareaphania*, these underground zines were unencumbered by advertising dollars and publisher interference, and as a result, they could venture where mainstream movie magazines feared to tread.

"You have to learn somewhere," Szpunar says. "You have to have an elder who sees this stuff, assesses it, and passes it down to you. And *Deep Red* did that for me. I was a weirdo, and suddenly I found this world that was talking to me... I felt a part of it."

Available in several formats through Headpress, *Xeroxferox* collects nearly 900 pages of interviews with pioneers of the horror zine community. Reading the book, it's clear that certain figures loomed large, including Stephen R. Bissette, the prolific fanzine writer and comics illustrator best known for collaborating on Alan Moore's legendary *Swamp Thing* series (and whose art adorns *Xeroxferox's* cover); the late Bill Landis, whose zine

Sleazoid Express vividly documented the experience of watching porn, exploitation, and horror films in the grindhouse theatres of New York's infamous 42nd Street; and filmmaker/programmer Ant Timpson's *Violent Leisure*.

Timpson started *Violent Leisure* in 1988 as a teen in Auckland, New Zealand, in order to have something to discuss and trade with like-minded horror freaks all over the world.

"It was just the simplest way to connect with people and read their work, and also be horribly embarrassed about how awful your work was compared to these much-more-established zines," Timpson laughs.

While Timpson is self-deprecating about his zine's content, its outrageous gross-out cover illustrations (see the "Vomit Issue"), snotty reviews, and drinking games show an irreverent and visionary sensibility in the making. You can see the same aesthetic in his savvily demented curatorial work as a film programmer (The Incredibly Strange Film Festival) and producer (*The Greasy Strangler*, *Deathgasm*, and *Turbo Kid*).

MEAN ZINES!

BY ALISON LANG



BLOODBATH

Feminist litzine based in Edinburgh. The upcoming *Vampires* issue will feature a special focus on Black writers.

HELLEBORE

Gorgeous perfect-bound folk horror zine with jaw-dropping illustrations and expert analysis.

NECRONOMICON

Articulate and funny horror movie review fanzine from the UK, just like Mom used to make.

NEKROMANTIKAL SCREAMS

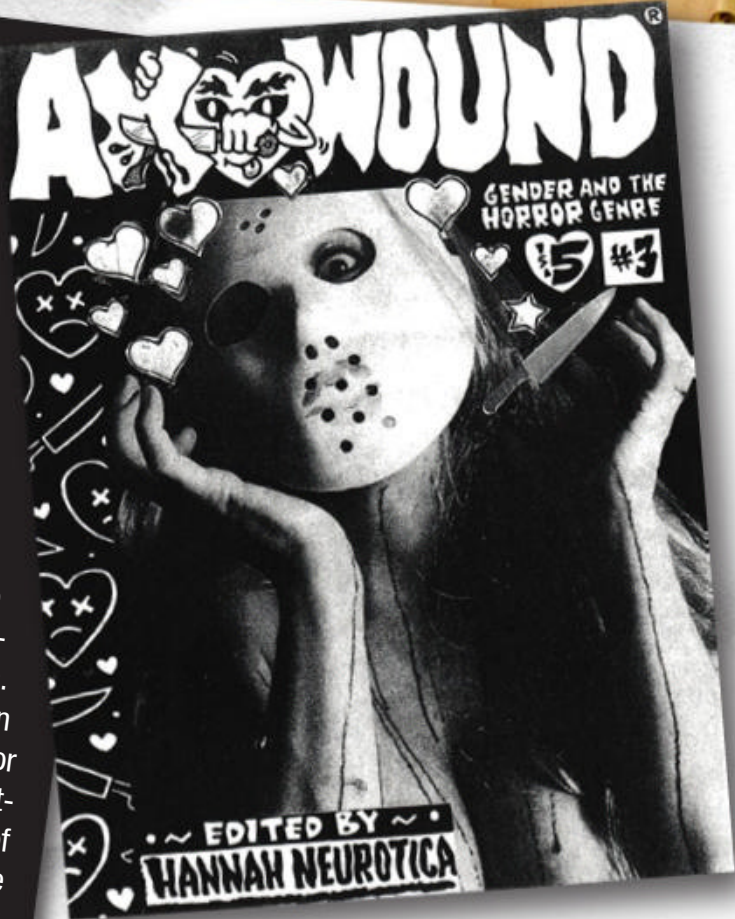
Perfect-bound horror fanzine/critzine based in Denmark, written/edited by horror zine legend Vanessa Hexe. Boasts a decidedly heavy-metal ethos and aesthetic, with features on *Alucarda*, *The Witch*, and more.

STAPLED SPINE

Exuberant cut-and-paste zine from Portland with a focus on horror-themed rock music. Contains wordsearches!

THE TWISTED MOUTH OF BLACK HORROR

An exploration of Blackness, monstrosity, and representation in horror, and the importance of art to Black survival.



One of Timpson's zine pen pals was Mike Gingold, who — years before writing for *Rue Morgue* — started his zine *Scareaphanalia* in the early '80s while still in high school. After discovering back issues of *Sleazoid Express* while browsing the Lincoln Center Library, the sixteen-year-old Gingold was inspired to make his own cut-and-paste newsletter-style zine to share his avid horror movie obsessions and opinions with a wider audience.

"Before the internet, having 250 people care what I had to say about horror movies was incredibly exciting," Gingold says. "Horror didn't have the best reputation [in the '80s]. A lot of people dismissed horror films as violent slasher garbage that exploited women. [*Scareaphanalia*] was my way of celebrating it and showing that there were so many good movies out there amongst the crap."

Gingold's process was typical of most cut-and-paste zinemakers: he typed out his reviews and "illustrated" them with ads clipped from the newspaper. Gingold's father then Xeroxed the zines at his office, and Gingold mailed out the copies to subscribers. He followed this process to the letter for nine years, mailing out copies every month without fail — even recruiting his parents to fill in while he was away at summer camp.

As *Scareaphanalia*'s readership grew, movie publicists began to see the value that it and other horror zines could provide in terms of word-of-mouth publicity, giving young Gingold unprecedented access to press junkets and intimate interviews with directors like Sam Raimi, Clive Barker, and Stuart Gordon. The zine's reputation eventually helped him get a job at *Fangoria* while still in college, leading to a more than twenty-year career with the magazine that included a stint as editor-in-chief.

"I think [the publicists] recognized that the fan press was an important part of getting the word out about the films," Gingold recalls. "The fact that they did that for these college-age kids with these little Xeroxed fanzines is pretty incredible."

As influential as the horror zine scene was in the '80s, it was also largely dominated by men. In the late '90s and early aughts, more women began to publish zines, including writer/programmer Kier-La Janisse (*House of Psychotic Women*) whose zine *CineM-uerte* begat a film festival of the same name. Similarly, Hannah Forman's feminist horror zine *Ax Wound* launched a film festival in 2014.

Forman was an Olympia, WA, col-

lege student in 2001 whose experience making zines came out of her connections to riot grrrl and punk. As a horror fan, she found herself getting frustrated with the male-dominated conversations in mainstream horror magazines and fan communities.

"At this time, *Fangoria* and other horror media didn't even try to be inclusive," Forman remembers. "It wasn't on the radar of these folks that women were actually a marketable audience. I don't think most women realized it either, because there was no social media or way for them to find each other. It was a dead zone."

Ax Wound's euphemistic title is a clue to its unapologetically feminist lens. The zine featured a mix of girl-mag whimsy ("Quiz: Which Final Girl Are You?"), spotlights on women working in horror (Rebekah McKendry, the Soska Sisters), and critical explorations of gender in movies like *Hell-raiser* and *Inside*.

For a zine that only ran four issues, *Ax Wound* made a major splash: it was written up in *Newsweek* in an article about horror and feminism and namechecked by Quentin Tarantino and Eli Roth in interviews. Although she's retired the zine, Forman has gone on to create Women in Horror Month and the Ax Wound Film Festival, which screens short horror films made by women and non-binary people.

Most importantly, *Ax Wound* was an opportunity to find kindred spirits within the world of horror fandom. This is the enduring power of the horror fanzine — it's an endlessly evolving tool for self-expression that unites all us weirdos, reminding us that we are never truly alone.

"Zines are so unique. They're messy, open invitations into someone's life," Forman says. "The beautiful and uneven black-and-white photocopies and clumsy margins appealed to my soul because I felt outside the margins too."





DAME DIABOLIQUE

ONE MIGHT THINK THAT IT WOULD BE COMMERCIAL SUICIDE TO LAUNCH A PRINT MAGAZINE at a time when so many were struggling to survive, but *Diabolique* did just that when it premiered in 2011. Interestingly, editor-in-chief Kat Ellinger credits the very thing that was threatening the publishing industry – the internet – for pushing the idea through.

"It allowed us to launch in the first place," Ellinger tells *Rue Morgue*. "But in the last several years there has been a swing in favour of instant media, which does make it a challenge to remain sustainable in print. It's definitely less lucrative than it used to be. Nobody sees it as an actual job anymore and everyone's a critic!"

Billed as "Gothic Horror for the Connoisseur" and lavishly illustrated, *Diabolique* found a devoted readership who appreciated its emphasis on quality and chronicling the evolution of horror entertainment as it happens.

"I think like all forms of journalism, horror journalism is there to provide cultural and historical documents," she says. "Many horror films tend to fade into obscurity over time and it's the magazines that keep documentary records of their time in production, the spotlight, telling the stories of the people who made these films. If it wasn't for horror journalism, a lot of this stuff would have been completely buried outside of fan dialogue."

Having recently announced a return to print this year after a four-year hiatus, *Diabolique* continues to be a vibrant brand online and has also produced its own films, most recently the *BloodMania* anthology by the late Herschell Gordon Lewis.

"I don't think magazines have the weight they used to when they were the only source of information around for fans," Ellinger says. "That said, our numbers on web read content continue to grow year on year, so I think people may read as much as they always have, just in a different format."

BENOIT BLACK



fans first and foremost.

"For *Bloody Disgusting*, it was always just about horror fans keeping other horror fans in the loop on everything horror related," he says. "As you know, it's a lifestyle for many of us, not just something we consume in our spare time."

Still, *Bloody Disgusting* had to use anything at its disposal to keep readers engaged, readers who had an estimated average attention span of a scant fifteen seconds. Young and hungry, *BD's* survival depended on providing the broadest strokes that could be achieved in this narrow window and rising to that challenge.

"I'd like to think horror journalism is different now as we find unique ways at delivering content – 'listicles' have evolved into in-depth analyses of films, actors, directors, subgenres, etc.," explains Miska. "It's wonderful how much there is to learn about the world through the lens of horror."

But in the ever-expanding world of the internet, *Bloody Disgusting* is the exception rather than the rule, and the glut of content run by fans, though ambitious, is often not up to the calibre of basic journalistic standards. You could even say that, for some, journalism is no longer the aim; an increasing number of online outlets seem to be less concerned with editorial standards and ethics than with marketing – more concerned with promoting movies than with assessing them.

"There are so many voices out there now and the bar has dropped much lower," laments Timpone. "Audiences overall are less interested in reviews today. All you need is a good trailer to entice people. But we should be *more* important, as we are needed to curate the overwhelming plethora of available horror today."

"There are tons of fan sites," Garris sums up, "but a true journalist brings historical perspective into the mix, hopefully with an education in the cinematic (or literary) past."

But that didn't stop the internet tsunami

from forcing us to re-evaluate our role. Had this classic art form suddenly shifted its audience from fans who identified with the horror genre to marketers who saw it as a tool to promote their products? Would all these great magazines become mere implements in a marketer's tool kit?

"Most fans today rather spend time watching horror that reading about it," says Timpone, who believes that a print magazine's appeal is more likely for marketers than readers. But not everyone agrees.

"I know that the horror sites and mags are watched by the publicists and marketers," says Garris, "but advertising means more to the studios and distributors than genre publicity."

"I don't think it matters one bit [one way of the other]," adds Lucas. "My only concern when I sit down to write something is what is important to me – what is it that I want to know? And I never consider an article or a review or a blog posting to be finished unless I have learned something myself through the process of writing about it and researching it."

Which brings us to the all important question: what is the future of horror journalism?

"My hope is that it will be far too diverse in its kind to be summarized in a single sentence," says Lucas. "I would like to say it's the future of such work to become more literate, more culturally aware, more open to the unusual, and better equipped with points of reference to the other arts and genres. Of course, what it will mostly be is coverage of what is new. What it is becoming for me is less magazine work and more work in the fields of Blu-ray audio commentary and movie monographs."

"The plethora of fan podcasts and websites and YouTube and TikTok channels is overwhelming, and I see no signs of the flood abating," adds Garris. "But I also see the mags like *Rue Morgue* and the new *Fangoria* approaching the subject of horror with respect and, equally important, knowledge."

WITH CENSOR, FILMMAKER PRANO BAILEY-BOND
EXPLORES THE TRIGGERS OF TRAUMA AGAINST THE
BACKDROP OF THE UK'S VIDEO NASTIES ERA

THE DEEPEST CUT

BY
MICHAEL
GINGOLD



CENSORSHIP AIN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE.

As these words are being written, the Internet is in an uproar over the decision by Dr. Seuss Enterprises to stop publishing six of the beloved author's books, and the deletion of a scene featuring harassment-happy Pepé Le Pew from *Space Jam: A New Legacy*. Cries of "censorship!" and "cancel culture!" have been flying everywhere, from people who don't seem to realize that corporate decisions to remove sensitive material from their own houses, while certainly debatable, are not censorship.

For a reminder of what the real thing – that is, government-sanctioned, media-encouraged censorship – looks like, along comes Prano Bailey-Bond's *Censor*, which premiered as part of this year's virtual Sundance Film Festival and will be released June 11 by Magnolia Pictures. It's set in 1985 during the height of the UK's "video nasties" scandal, during which video stores carrying violent horror tapes were raided and their owners prosecuted, while inflammatory tabloid headlines screamed that "sadist videos" were corrupting children and turning them into criminals. Under the 1984 Video Recordings Act, the BBFC (an acronym whose meaning, ironically, had changed from the British Board of Film Censors to the British Board of Film Classification at that point) rated all new video releases and re-rated old ones, with numerous fright films severely cut for their approval.

Censor focuses on one of the people who decided how many beheadings, disembowelings, and eye-gougings were too much. Enid Baines (Niamh Algar) works in an unnamed office where she and her colleagues screen the shockers to determine just how much gore needs to go. She has trauma of her own in her past: her sister Nina mysteriously vanished when they were kids, for which she still carries the weight of guilt. When she watches *Don't Go in the Church*, the latest work of enigmatic and uncompromising filmmaker Frederick North, it triggers her memories of Nina's disappearance, and Enid becomes obsessed with tracking down the connection. As she descends deeper into this psychological rabbit hole, it becomes unclear how much of the horror she discovers is real, and how much is manufactured within her tortured psyche.

Bailey-Bond, who scripted *Censor* with Anthony Fletcher, was "quite young" during the nasties' heyday.

"I didn't become aware of the term 'video nasties' until I was an adult," she explains. "It feels like I've always known it, but I wasn't aware of the social hysteria and everything that was going on around them when I was growing up. I was just watching horror films and enjoying them. I wasn't reading the *Daily Mail*, seeing the stories about Mary Whitehouse [the conservative activist who led the charge against the nasties] and all that. That was stuff I discovered as an adult, and looked back at and thought, 'Wow!'"

The genesis of *Censor* lay in a magazine article Bailey-Bond read about an earlier part of horror history: the Hammer Films era.

"This article was talking about the things the censors would look out for back then," she recalls. "One of the things they would cut was blood on the breast of a woman, because they believed it would make men likely to commit rape. I was like, 'Well, weren't most of the film censors men?' And I went into this thinking, if these films are meant to make us do bad things, then what prevents the censor from losing control? So I wanted to explore a film censor, and the video-nasty era is so fascinating, it was a no-brainer to set it during that period."

The film that emerged thus focuses more on the personal than the political. Though it does touch on issues surrounding the nasties phenomenon (particularly the press who blame Enid when a copycat crime, allegedly inspired by a film she passed for release, hits the tabloids), *Censor* is mostly concerned with Enid's journey into the darker sides of her own soul, including

those she has repressed. In a sense, Enid is engaging in psychological self-censorship, and her quest leads her to pick up the pieces lying on her mental cutting room floor. It's an expansion of ideas Bailey-Bond and co-writer Fletcher first explored in their award-winning 2015 short *Nasty*, in which a young boy trying to solve his father's disappearance in 1982 is sucked into the world of the grisly videos.

"We always wanted Enid to embody the idea of censorship," she says, "and I felt there should be something in her past that she can't access, the way that happens to people who've been through traumatic experiences. A lot of kids who have gone through things like that don't fully remember them, because our brains kind of protect us from that. It stemmed from making *Nasty*, and the idea of a family member who'd gone missing and the need to work that out, and we were always looking at how we could take on the things we wanted to talk about relating to censorship and craft a character out of them.


"Those [political] elements are nodded to-





Nasty Women: Director Prano Bailey-Bond used the films-within-a-film conceit as an opportunity to pay homage to the work of Lucio Fulci and Dario Argento.


THE NEW NASTIES


HORROR MAY HAVE DEFEATED CENSORSHIP THANKS TO THE ADVENT OF THE INTERNET, but some movies are still banned for reasons that are stranger than fiction. Here are six of the weirdest wrist-slaps in recent cinematic history...


 [Alien Vs. Predator](#) was rated R by the MPAA for "Violence, language, horror images, slime (!) and gore."

 Disaster movie [2012](#) was banned in North Korea for fear it would jinx what Kim Jong-il believed to be the country's "lucky year."

 China banned [Ghostbusters](#) (the 1984 original and the 2016 reboot) for fear of promoting superstition.

 When Claire Danes made critical remarks about the Philippines after shooting [Broken Palace](#), the actor and all her movies were banned from Manila.

 [The Hunger Games](#)' storyline concerning kids engaged in deadly totalitarian resistance proved too controversial for Vietnam. Thailand supported it until protesters started adopting the film's three-fingered salute – then it was banned.

 [E.T.](#) was restricted from viewing by small children in Sweden, Finland, and Norway for fear that it "portrays adults as the enemies of children." Predictably, kids picketed cinemas.

ANDREA SUBISSATI



Alien Vs. Predator



The Final Cut: The line between fantasy and reality blurs when Enid is blamed for a rash of copycat killings based on a movie she allowed to pass.

wards, but they don't take over the film," Bailey-Bond continues. "It's much more about Enid and what's in her mind, and how our perception of reality is structured by the things we see. Right now, for example, we're all sitting at home and getting so much information through our screens because we're not going out so much. I think about how that affects us as individuals, and how we feel and think and behave, and that's what we were trying to use that political aspect for. How it feeds into the way Enid interprets what's going on, and the responsibility she feels, the pressure she puts herself under, the idea of finding a person to blame for the bad things happening in the world. Enid puts all that blame on herself, and that's what we're exploring."

Over the course of her own exploration, Enid discovers more of North's oeuvre, including a movie called *Asunder* that provides another potential tie to her own history. The further down this road she goes, the more Enid's life comes to resemble a horror film, and Bailey-Bond enjoyed the opportunity to pay visual homage to some of her favourite fright fare in the films-within-the-film as well as Enid's deteriorating reality.

"I'm a big fan of Lucio Fulci and Dario Argento, so I was looking at those and other movies for our video nasties," she says. "I was quite specific about each one, and for *Asunder* and the later part of the film, Fulci's work was especially inspiring. I love [The Beyond](#) and [The House by the Cemetery](#), and their rich, vivid imagery. And then [Blood on Satan's Claw](#) was an influence for *Don't Go in the Church*. I had all my crew watch those films."

That team included cinematographer Annika Summerson, production designer Paulina Rzeszowska, and editor Mark Towns, the latter two of whom also worked on another recent acclaimed study of a woman's obsession and breakdown: Rose Glass' [Saint Maud](#). Other key contributors include prosthetics creator [Dan Martin](#) (*Color Out of Space*, *Possessor*) and makeup and hair designer Ruth Pease, who

gave *Censor* some nasty moments of its own.

Given her taste in movies, Bailey-Bond clearly has few issues with the extremities the genre can explore, though she does reveal one notorious title that tripped her too-much switch.

"A few years before I made *Censor*, a friend gave me the uncut version of [A Serbian Film](#)," she recalls. "Before that, I'd only felt that cruelty to animals or real-life violence was problematic. Particularly something like [Cannibal Holocaust](#) – the cruelty to the turtles and so forth really upsets me. But then in *A Serbian Film*, I saw things that made me feel like I was an overreacting, other-side-of-the-line type of person, going, 'Oh, this shouldn't be out there!' It really made me evaluate what I think about censorship, because I believe a lot of stuff is fine to watch, and if somebody wants to watch that, they should be able to. But then suddenly, I was seeing a film that made me think, 'But not this!' You start to realize that it's all so subjective."

It's an issue that resonates just as strongly today, even though the targets change, as they seem to do every decade or so.

"While making *Censor*, I was looking at the period and these other instances of moral panic throughout history," says Bailey-Bond. "In the '50s you had comic books and how they were going to turn all the little boys into bad people, and then it was rock music and hip hop. And I was thinking about how scared we are of ourselves – we must be, to think that these things are going to make us change just like that. We're kind of terrified of ourselves as humans, or each other, if we think our moral compass is so fragile that we're going to listen to a rock song or play a video game and then go out and do something terrible. It's a lot more complicated than that; it has much more to do with society and how we treat each other and look after each other, and compassion and understanding. Those things should all come into play when we have these conversations, rather than just turning around and blaming new media." 🤪





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BACK IN 1973, SURREALIST PAINTER OTTO RAPP COMMITTED A TERRIFYING VISION TO CANVAS THAT CONTINUES TO FASCINATE THE GENRE'S IMAGINATION FIVE DECADES LATER

CONQUERING THE WORM

BY RICH JOHNSON



HERE IS STRANGE ALCHEMY AT PLAY IN THE WORKS OF MULTIMEDIA MYSTIC ARTIST OTTO RAPP, ONE OF SPIRAL RAPTURES, DARK STARS, WORMHOLES, AND THE WRITHING OF MUCH SMALLER THINGS. Amongst this fearful symmetry, a kaleidoscope of the grotesque

reveals arguably one of the most disturbing paintings committed to canvas: *The Deterioration Of Mind Over Matter* (1973) which explores the traumatic both consciously (and subconsciously), questioning both an artist's intentions and the very definition of horror.

Born on December 15, 1944, in Felixdorf. Rapp grew up in post-war Austria and later lived most of his life in Canada. His process explores the surrealist movement of fantastic realism as defined by a group of painters – including his “kindred spirit,” [Ernst Fuchs](#) – working in late '50s Vienna when they merged the techniques of the old masters with modern art movements and psychoanalysis. This Daliesque style, intrinsically linked to trauma and world war wastelands, provided Rapp the perfect escape from his own experiences as a child, witnessing the horrors of war through the lens of innocence.

“What weighed heavily on me were those early years in Vienna,” Rapp tells *Rue Morgue*. “More than 50 percent of the buildings on my street were destroyed and we would often play in the ruins where we made some grisly finds beneath the underground's abandoned bomb shelters. I remember Russian soldiers patrolling our district and the fear of people to say or do anything wrong. These were truly traumatic times, and memories of it keep surfacing.”

These early childhood experiences influenced many of Rapp's pieces during that period, but *Deterioration...* stands apart, having now become

his signature work: a vibrantly gruesome decomposing skull dripping sinew from a bird cage, a safety pin struggling to hold its flesh to the bone. On one level it provides a gruesome mirror – fear personified – while on another it digs deeper under the skin to reveal something truly universal: a reminder of our mortality. This is, as critic

J. Brooks Joyner commented during a 1976 exhibit, “truly an image that could have been utilized in the former issues of *Tales From the Crypt*, in fact, it brings to mind in its own scary way the imaginations of Edgar Allan Poe. The poem, ‘The Conqueror Worm’ comes to mind immediately.”

Deterioration... arrived during the height of progressive rock and the early years of heavy metal, when artwork that graced album covers combined elements both dark and whimsical. (Several of Rapp's images were employed to promote music, with *Deterioration...* appearing on *Abnormal Condition of the Mind*, the 2012 album from Brazilian heavy metal act Vengeance of Mine.) Hugely inspired by this period, it explicitly demonstrates fantastic realism – eroticism, the psychedelic, a Jodorowsky-inspired character and mindscape – while also (whether intentional or not) an obvious taste of ‘Rappture.’

Those with a discerning eye will see an appreciation in the piece for Rapp's contemporaries [Zdzisław Beksiński](#) and [H.R. Giger](#), who also show obvious parallels to Rapp in the way their artwork expels their own demons and dystopian nightmares, and seeks a similar sense

of catharsis. For Rapp, however, the darkness of his art is more about purging the gruesome than revelling in it.

“Bringing it out is a relief, to see and master what was merely a dark and faceless presence in one's mind,” he explains, adding an obvious appre-



ciation for other artists whose work also reflected the events of their own time, “I am very moved by images like Goya and Géricault. Particularly the latter, when one knows from history that he took body parts to his studio to paint from. This I would never be able to do. That is truly macabre. In fact, I don’t like going to funerals. Or hunting. In my early years in Canada, a friend took me along. He shot a deer but it was not a clean kill and the animal’s agony touched me deeply. Art is different. Claes Oldenburg once said, ‘When Ray Guns shoot, nobody dies.’”

When pressed further on his themes, Rapp, a true surrealist, maintains that his material taps into emotions that all people share, if only they allow the terror to sink in.

“These are universal archetypes that may be found deep inside our collective unconscious,” he says. “While seemingly extraterrestrial and alien, they are also strangely familiar. I take the viewer into an area that they might have been before in another existence or have entered in their dreams. It is a ‘method in this madness’ but everything arises by the elimination of conscious guidance. The work grows seemingly by itself, like frost flowers on a windowpane.”

Rapp remains forever fascinated by the bizarre. As a younger artist during the late '60s and early '70s, his art may have been designed to shock, but he was always encouraged by the positive response to his darkest work.

“At that time, I was in a different frame of mind, I called that period from the early '70s my ‘Scare the Neighbours’ period,” he admits. “It was almost like putting on a mask at Halloween and getting a kick out of people’s reactions. It was the satisfaction of an actor having played his part well. Now that time has passed, I was rather surprised that it attracted so much attention.”

Active as an artist since his time in Sweden during the '60s, Rapp went on to found the private Visionary Art Network and the public Visionary Art Gallery in 2009. Now working from his studio at Kunstquartier Wien, he continues to sell merchandise that includes Deterioration... T-shirts and facemasks, and even run a blog and provide resources dedicated to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Certainly, the terror of these tumultuous times has only enhanced the relevance of *The Deterioration Of Mind Over Matter*, a painting that continues to resonate with fans of the dark and macabre.

“It is horror fans that had pushed sales of prints from this old painting of mine higher than any other artwork,” says Rapp, “How relevant the piece is, lies with them.”

Learn more about Otto Rapp at artofthemystic.com, vagallery.com and visionaryartexhibition.com. 🧐



Terrible Beauty: Otto Rapp’s style brought a surrealist approach to the horrors of war. From top: *Revelation 20*, *Monument To The Unborn War Hero*, *Bogomil’s Court*, and (opposite) *The Deterioration Of Mind Over Matter*.



I WISH YOU HELL

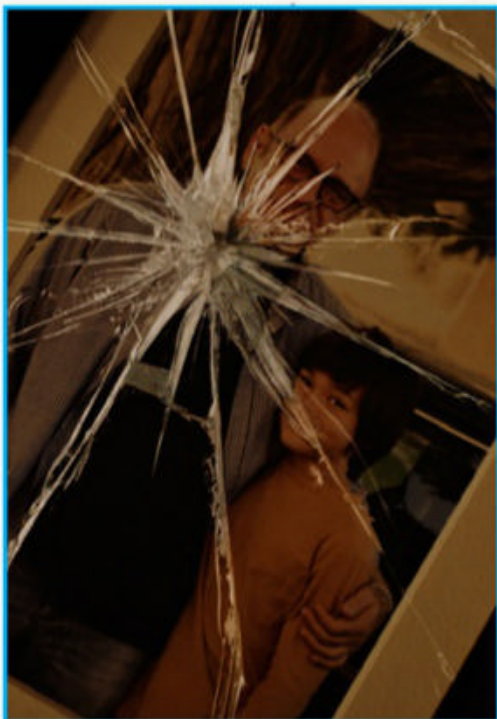
THE DJINN

Starring Ezra Dewey, Rob Brownstein and Tevy Poe
Written and directed by David Charbonier
and Justin Powell
IFC Midnight

Pop culture is well enough acquainted with the djinn these days – the shape-shifting Arabic analogue to the genie, who meddles in earthly affairs for the hell of it. This second feature from filmmaking duo David Charbonier and Justin Powell (following last year's *The Boy Behind the Door*) takes some creative liberties with the existing djinn mythos, but the kind nobody wished for.

Young Dylan (Ezra Dewey, also returning from *The Boy Behind the Door*) has just moved to into a new apartment with his radio DJ dad (Rob Brownstein) following some soon-to-be-revealed unpleasantness involving the death of his mother (Tevy Poe). Left alone one night while his father works the

graveyard shift, Dylan discovers an old book in his bedroom closet containing detailed instructions for summoning spirits. An unspecified procedure left the lad with a large Y-shaped scar on his chest and the inability to speak, so when he learns of the legendary djinn who can grant wishes at a terrible price, Dylan can't resist the opportunity to reclaim his voice, leading to a long night of torment at the hands of a malevolent spirit.



From a production standpoint, *The Djinn* is glossy and well-produced, with heartfelt performances from Dewey and Brownstein. Charbonier and Powell effectively build suspense as the shape-shifting entity stalks his silent prey in a small apartment setting, but their newfangled djinn mythology is almost as intangible as the titular monster itself, with powers and abilities too loosely defined to fully invest in Dylan's peril. Ultimately *The Djinn* is too toothless to be taken seriously and too dreary for a fun thrill; save your monkey's paw digits for another *Wishmaster* instead.

ANDREA SUBISSATI

DOUBLY DEMENTED

DEMENTIA PART II

Starring Matt Mercer, Suzanne Voss
and Najarra Townsend
Written and directed by Matt Mercer and Mike Testin
Dark Star Pictures

Rising to a dare proposed by their executive producers, Mike Testin and Matt Mercer took *Dementia Part II* from idea to screen in a mere month [see *RM#199*]. This comedic companion piece to Testin's 2015 film *Dementia* proves that a bit of moxie and a lot of goop can more than make up for a tiny budget and an even tinier production window.

Mercer stars as Wendell, an affable ex-con who takes a gig as a handyman to fulfill his parole conditions. When he arrives at the home of elderly widow Suzanne (Suzanne Voss) to unclog some pipes, Mercer realizes that Suzanne is going to be a handful. One moment she's a nervous, sweet grandma, then she's suddenly rambling about Skynet, and then she's threatening Wendell with an automatic rifle. Suzanne is much more than a handful and an apparent *Terminator* fan: she's unstable and



dangerous. Oh, and she's also dead.

Dementia Part II isn't afraid to lean into the bonkers potential of its premise as it gamely serves up plenty of gross-out humour, including a toxic vomit-induced psychedelic trip sequence and ample use of squelchy sound effects. But underneath the goofiness and goo lies a touch of pathos thanks to Voss' empathetic performance. Suzanne could have been a mere rabid granny caricature, but instead she's a woman who has had a full, rich life but has unfortunately fallen ill and become... well, a rabid granny. Toss in an acerbic grifter played by Mercer's *Contracted* co-star Najarra Townsend; a Canadian Mountie uniform; Testin's cost-saving, sharp black and white cinematography; and plenty of spilled guts, and you're in for a slimy, sleek good time.

STACIE PONDER

CAMPUS CAN BE KILLER

INITIATION

Starring Lochlyn Munro, Froy Gutierrez and Lindsay LaVanchy
Directed by John Berardo
Written by John Berardo, Lindsay LaVanchy and Brian Frager
Saban Films

It's been a while since I've spent time on a university campus, but *Initiation* suggests that not much has changed; drunk on newfound freedom as much as cheap vodka/Sunny D, undergrads are still destroying their livers while they expand their minds. But one thing kids have to contend with today that I didn't was the certainty of seeing my toga-clad keg-stand appear on social media, which is the film's scariest takeaway for any

pre-millennial horror fan.

It's homecoming time, and frat pledges are living up to their reputations by employing a secret code on Instagram to distinguish the sluts from the... whatever else there is. On the flipside, the sorority is learning the fundamentals of female undergrad life – i.e., checking in when you get home, bathroom visits in pairs, and occasionally rescuing each other from the wrong side of a



Initiation

frat boy's locked bedroom door. Sorority mama bear Ellery (co-writer Lindsay LaVanchy) tries to look out for her pledges as well as her Olympic hopeful brother Wes (Froy Gutierrez), but when a masked killer starts picking off students and staff with an oversize drill, everyone is a suspect in the pre-prom penetration party.

If archetypal early twentysomethings speaking in hashtags make you cringe, *Initiation* sure as shit won't cure you of that – if you're into seeing them drilled to death by an assailant in a wearable disco ball, however, you're in luck. *Initiation* packs enough familiar slasher tropes and victim-appropriate murder to pass Filmmaking 101, but the movie can't seem to decide if it's playing for laughs or feels. Tighter editing to the tune of twenty minutes cut would have made for a better grade, but it's a fun one to slap on between Zoom classes and virtual hookups. Just keep your phone on hand for scrolling between the kills.

ANDREA SUBISSATI

#ALOHA

THE RESORT

Starring Michael Vlamis, Brock O'Hurn and Bianca Haase
Written and directed by Taylor Chien
Vertical Entertainment

There was a time when beautiful, white idiots marching to their deaths was the backbone of the horror genre. *The Resort* may not quite take

you back, but it's an unfussy tropical jaunt that, at a mere 75 minutes, doesn't even have time to grate on the viewer, though it tries its darnedest.

We first meet Lex (Bianca Haase) as she awakens in a hospital bed. Speaking to an investigator, Lex recounts how she and friends Sam (Michal Vlamis), Bree (Michelle Randolph), and Chris (sentient man-bun and Instagram stud muffin, Brock O'Hurn) travelled to an abandoned Hawaiian hotel that's reportedly home to the spectral "half-faced girl," in the hopes of experiencing real paranormal activity to serve as material for Lex's next book.

As might be expected when a quarter of your onscreen talent is comprised of social media "personalities," Lex, Bree, Sam, and Chris are your standard set of privileged, Abercrombie catalogue a-holes, but *The Resort* does attempt to endear them to the viewer. The majority of the brief runtime is devoted to Lex and co. taking in scenic views while the soundtrack pulses with YouTube-ready Trop House beatz, and waxing moronic about death and the afterlife. When the haunting finally starts, director Taylor Chien does a lot with very little, serving up hot pink lighting, wiggly camera work, an impressive peeled face, one juicy crushed skull, and a bugshit nonsensical ending that feels like more than enough payoff for a film designed to pad out a streaming service's library. It's an island's throw away from a five-star affair, but *The Resort* goes down like top-shelf Piña Colada mix.

ROCCO T. THOMPSON





OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE'S GRAB BAG O' GORE

HARMAGEDDON



IMPACT EVENT

Wildeye Releasing

As a gift to myself for surviving last year, I thought I'd reach into my bottomless delete bin of delights and grab the first three movies my greasy paws came across. And speaking of the end of the world, this first flick is about a group of people who learn the Earth is about to be hit by a meteorite and take refuge in a haunted funhouse attraction that's built on a bomb shelter. Unfortunately, the inmates at a nearby prison also have designs on the place, hoping to take it over so they can

keep all the toilet paper and hand sanitizer for themselves. Though it's competently filmed and has a cool cameo from Michael (The Hills Have Eyes) Berryman, *Impact Event* suffers from a soundtrack that will make your ears bleed and thrill-less kill scenes. When the end of the world really does come, I call dibs on the abandoned doll factory!

BODY COUNT: 11

BEST DRINKING GAME: A shot every time you see a bald guy

THAT'S A STRETCH



SUSPENSION

Anchor Bay Entertainment

Also known as *Dead of Night*, *Suspension* follows Emily, a high school senior who's bullied by the cool kids and neglected by her mother, who leaves her alone at home. So, whenever she feels overwhelmed, Emily uses her imagination to disappear into a world of make-believe with her younger brother only to get jolted back into reality when a serial killer comes calling, covered in the blood of anyone who's ever been mean to her. Featuring a strong performance by Ellen MacNevin in the lead role,

Suspension is an entertaining movie stacked with buckets of the red stuff and some terrific twists that this old gorehound never saw coming. It was definitely worth living through the pandemic just to watch it!

BODY COUNT: 9

BEST DRINKING GAME: A shot every time you think there's going to be nudity

ACHTUNG!



TRUE LOVE WAYS

MVD Visual

Every so often I dig up a movie that I wish I'd left in the bin to decompose with the other drips and dregs. This German outing is one of those films! Shot in black and white in what I can only imagine was some sort of an attempt at art house, *True Love Ways* follows a girl named Séverine, who spends most of her time lying in bed. After she dumps her boyfriend, he conspires with a stranger to kidnap Séverine so he can then rescue her and look like a hero. What could possibly go wrong? Soon

enough, the black goo is flowing and the whole thing devolves into a meandering mess that'll have you wondering if someone switched the case on your DVD. When I finished watching *True Love Ways*, I buried it in my backyard so it couldn't hurt anyone ever again. Bitte schön!

BODY COUNT: 6

BEST DRINKING GAME: A shot every time you have no idea what the fuck is going on

LAST CHANCE LANCE

PETRI-FYING

THE DEEP ONES

Starring Gina La Piana, Robert Miano and Johann Urb

Written and directed by Chad Ferrin

123 GO

To say that the H.P. Lovecraft-inspired *The Deep Ones* feels like a throwback to 1980s independent horror is not to suggest that it's as adventurous in its adaptation as Stuart Gordon's *Re-Animator* or *From Beyond*. It covers the basics of the lore, telling a no-frills story of an innocent couple whose vacation submerges them in a community beholden to ancient (and tentacled) gods and monsters.

Writer/director Chad Ferrin's film (which hit select theatres in late April and sees digital release in June) begins with Alexandria (Gina La Piana) and her Finnish husband Petri (Johann Urb) travelling to the Solar Beach Colony, where they're staying in a lovely home owned by welcoming older couple Russel (B-movie veteran Robert Miano) and Ingrid (Silvia Spross). Alex and Petri are trying to have another baby following a recent miscarriage, and it's not hard to figure out that the Solar Beach residents might have their own impregnation plans for Alex. We quickly find out that the house is equipped with hidden cameras, and at the twenty-minute mark, Petri is subjected to a weird, visceral ritual indoctrinating him into the cult. Now the only question is whether Alex will be able to resist and escape their twisted plans for her.

If there aren't many surprises to *The Deep Ones*, it does have plenty of low-budget charms, and Ferrin doesn't play down to the material. He respects the source and sustains a proper atmosphere of weirdness, peppered with eccentric details, including a doctor played by Timothy Muskatell in drag. (Her name is Dr. Gene Rayburn, a truly odd reference amidst the expected shout-outs to Cthulhu, Dagon, etc.) Complete with an old-fashioned score by frequent Gordon collaborator Richard Band, *The Deep Ones* satisfies like the kind of movie you might have rented on VHS back in the late '80s, when Lovecraftian cinema was just starting to take hold.

MICHAEL GINGOLD



GIRLS NIGHT

SEANCE

Starring Suki Waterhouse, Madisen Beaty and Ella-Rae Smith

Written and directed by Simon Barrett

RLJE Films

The trailer for *Seance* might promise something more akin to *The Craft* sequel we would have preferred over last year's *Legacy* letdown, but having penned some of horror's more interesting entries of the last decade (see *The Guest*, *You're Next*, and *Blair Witch*),



Seance

Simon Barrett's feature directorial debut is more slashing than spellbinding.

We all know what "boys will be boys" means, but "girls will be girls" might well describe *Seance*, where a clique of tartan-clad private school mean girls scare the crap out of each other by calling on urban legends after lights out. Led by Alice (Inanna Sarkis), the group summons the ghost of a former student who died on school premises but the gag culminates in another girl plummeting to her death from her dorm window.



Was it suicide, the headmistress' creepy home-schooled son (*Channel Zero*'s Seamus Patterson), or the dreaded Edelvine Academy ghost? New student Camille (Suki Waterhouse, *Assassination Nation*) doesn't know, but as the clique's latest target, she'll likely find out before the end of the semester.

Lively and interesting throughout its 92-minute runtime, *Seance*'s mystery reveal doesn't exactly channel the ghost of Agatha Christie, but Waterhouse is a compelling lead with a brooding dark side that simmers when it's not boiling over into full-on wrath. These girls are hardly sugar and spice and everything nice – they're tough as nails, with fists

as vicious as their cutting insults, and the film's climax is more unexpectedly bloody than it is narratively satisfying. Still, Barrett's on a winning streak for characterizing bad bitches and letting the tension seep from scenes that smoulder; we'll be waiting on what's next.

ANDREA SUBISSATI

PAIN TOLERANCE

THRESHOLD

Starring Madison West, Joey Millin and Daniel Stevens
Directed by Patrick Robert Young and Powell Robinson
Written by Patrick Robert Young
Arrow Films

Just because you *can* film a movie in twelve days on two iPhones doesn't mean you should. Indeed, the iPhone angle is about the only interesting thing about *Threshold*; it's otherwise an undercooked pile of what the kids these days are calling "elevated horror" that tries (and fails) to redeem its thankfully short running time with three final minutes of what the filmmakers doubtless think are relentless scares. They're not.

The film opens with Leo (Joey Millin) being tasked by his mother with tracking down and bringing home his junkie sister Virginia (Madison West). Leo does and immediately wants to drive her to rehab, partly because he's done with her

lies and partly because he wants to get back to his wife and child. But Virginia insists she's been sober eight months and has instead been cursed by a cult. Leo understandably calls bullshit but is moved enough by his sister's insistence to agree to help her, if she promises to go to treatment when her story is proven to be false. What follows is a boring road trip to find the other cult member with whom Virginia has been psychically bound while she and Leo try rebuild their damaged relationship. That means a lot of motel conversations, some dive bar karaoke, and some heartwarming sibling pumpkin carving before the shocking climax (which is only shocking in its barely scripted sloppiness).

Unsurprisingly, much of *Threshold* was improvised by its leads, and while spontaneity and improvisation are often wonderful filmic elements, here they only serve to underscore how little is actually going on. Low-key dialogue-driven indie horror can work – 2008's *Baghead* comes to mind – but co-directors Patrick Robert Young and Powell Robinson might want to try putting some actual thought into their next project.



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ON THE SLAB: LGBTQUICKIES

THE QUIET ROOM

27:41 mins/Crypt TV on YouTube

By nature, short films rarely leave room for nuance or character work, but director Sam Wineman takes great care to deliver in both departments in *The Quiet Room*. When Michael (Jamal Douglas) is admitted to the hospital after a suicide attempt, he's up against his own survivor's guilt following the death of his boyfriend as well as an obsessive demon named Hopeless Hattie (Alaska Thunderfuck) who threatens to consume him. Wineman defies expectations throughout this film, featuring queer characters whose stories aren't defined solely by being queer, exploring depression and suicide in a way that seems realistic yet hopeful, and hiring a fan favourite from *Ru Paul's Drag Race* to portray a monster without so much as a cheeky wink. Add to this an absolutely heart-wrenching performance from Jamal Douglas, and you get a short that will possess you just as fiercely as Hopeless Hattie.

LABRYS

7:22 mins/Vimeo via BJ Colangelo's channel

Superhero films often play in the realm of wish fulfillment and in *Labrys*, B.J. Colangelo presents a pretty simple wish: to be left the hell alone by homophobic bigots. Leenie (Venchise Glenn) and Jill (Madison Woods) are on the tail end of a pretty adorable date when the fun is cut short by the unwanted advances of a creep (Christopher Marinin) leering at them from across the bar. When said creep assaults Jill as she tries to get to her car, Leenie returns and handles the situation in spectacular and messy fashion involving the titular weapon (an ancient Greek word for a double-sided ax). While Colangelo combines fun superhero tropes with even funner gore, a chilling implication of how these situations play out in real life when there's no one with superpowers around to save the day lurks under the surface.

PYOTR495

14:16 mins/Alter on YouTube

Pyotr495 opens with a prologue set in 2014 Russia, where Vladimir Putin has just approved the LGBT Propaganda Law banning depictions of gay life as "normal" (a real law enacted in Russia in 2013, by the way). Next, we meet Pyotr (Alex Ozerov), a sixteen-year-old boy who connects with Sergei (Max Rositsan) on a dating app. Given the set-up, it's sadly unsurprising when Pyotr is abducted and subjected to all manner of abuse, but just when the film appears to be a bleak cautionary tale about the dangers of state-sanctioned violence, things take a wholly unexpected turn with plenty of nasty comeuppance to go around. The commentary loses none of its bite, however, as the film's resolution packs a mean streak that explores how systematic oppression quickly becomes personal, messy, and pretty damn ugly.

BRYAN CHRISTOPHER

TURN DOWN THE SUCK

SOUND OF VIOLENCE

Starring Jasmin Savoy Brown, Lili Simmons and James Jagger

Written and directed by Alex Noyer

Gravitas Ventures

Sound of Violence begins with a promising prologue: a young deaf girl witnesses a shocking act of violence, commits one of her own, undergoes a synesthetic experience (she can suddenly hear the brutality, which triggers hallucinatory visions) and thereafter becomes fixated on repeating it. But when we rejoin Alexis in her late twenties (played by Jasmin Savoy Brown), the film turns into an underdeveloped *Saw* knockoff in indie/art-house drag.

With the help of her roommate/possible girlfriend Marie (Lili Simmons), Alexis – who has largely recovered her hearing, though it still cuts out now and again – records audio of things like S&M sessions and incorporates it into experimental music pieces. When that fails to satisfy, she turns to murder, and not just garden-variety slayings: she employs elaborate means to torture and dispatch her victims while capturing the sounds of their agony. Alexis is able to commit her crimes while largely evading notice, though Sonya Fuentes (Tessa Munro), a generic Movie Detective who says things like "The precision, the overkill... it's not over," is on the case.

Among *Sound of Violence*'s many issues, a key one is that it can't figure out whether we're supposed to be sympathetic to Alexis as a damaged soul or fear her as an unbalanced human monster. Her obsession is handled in a one-dimensional manner; the film could have been an exploration of how we use art to process trauma in our lives, a deep dive into the obsessive power of music, or just an over-the-top sensory horror experience, but it doesn't fully commit. A character study that lacks sufficient psychological depth, the exaggerated death set pieces feel gratuitous, and some of the set-ups suffer from basic implausibilities (Alexis doses a woman's drink in plain sight at a crowded party, and nobody notices). "I wish you could hear what I hear" is one of the final lines, and *Sound of Violence* leaves you wishing you could see what writer/director Alex Noyer saw in this material.

KEN MICHAELS



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WRITTEN, SHOT, AND SET AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, A NEW ECO-HORROR FROM BRITISH AUTEUR **BEN WHEATLEY** CASTS ITS GAZE ON OUR CURRENT COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

INTO THE WOODS

BY **ANDREA SUBISSATI**

These are strange times, indeed. As the COVID virus slowly inches its way toward possible resolution, citizens of Earth are eager to return to normal – or at least, to see what post-pandemic normal might look like. While many stalled major film productions have resumed their pre-lockdown stories, British filmmaker Ben Wheatley (*Kill List*, *Sightseers*) chose to set his new film *In the Earth* right smack in the middle of that same pandemic. It only makes sense, given the circumstances under which it was conceived.

“*[In the Earth]* was all purely from the pandemic,” Wheatley tells *Rue Morgue*. “It was a response, it was an attempt to keep my own sanity at the beginning of the lockdown, so I decided to write some scripts. I’ve found now, I write things for myself a lot and I’ll treat a script as a film that I haven’t seen so I can see that movie and then move on. So I write a lot of things that I never make and I always have done that. This was partially to try to make sense of what was going on as much as anything, and for my own presence of mind.”

In the film, scientist Dr. Martin Lowery (Joel Fry) teams up with park ranger Alma (*Midsommar*’s Ellora Torchia) to rendezvous with Dr. Olivia Wendle (Hayley Squires) who stopped responding from her research hub deep in the woods. Attacked in the night by an unseen assailant who steals their gear and their shoes, Martin and Alma find themselves at the mercy of park resident Zach (Reece Shearsmith), who has his own strange philosophies about his woodland home and his relationship to it. Stranger still is a nearby rock outcropping with a perfectly circular hole in its centre, a landmark that holds the eccentric woodsman as well as the missing scientist in its thrall. Something awaits in the earth, and Dr.

Wendle’s research suggests that we might be able to communicate with it by speaking in its own wordless language.

“I’m excited about cinema and I’m excited about its strengths, and light and sound are two of the big strengths of cinema, and I wanted to tie them directly into the DNA of the movie,” says Wheatley, adding that the lockdown production schedule allowed him more time

to work with the film’s composer, Clint Mansell, on a unique sound design. “We had a good four or five months of experimenting and one of the experiments [Mansell] did was that he dug up this thing called a MIDI Sprout, which is a bit of equipment with which you could [record] electrical pulses of plants, or the bioelectrical pulses, so that he would then feed that into his synthesizers and then that would become part of the texture of the music. We wanted that feeling, that the actual plant life was involved in the sound.”

Technical experimentation aside, Wheatley’s biggest aim with *In the Earth* is to tell a story that speaks directly to our experience of surviving a global pandemic, rather than pretend it never happened.

“I was watching movies and it felt like the moment had moved forward and that everything felt less relevant,” he says. “Everyone seemed to be in denial that it happened, and they want it to be like a continuum where this last year didn’t happen to anybody. I think it’s going to affect people in many ways, and certainly generations will be affected; the younger people will be heavily af-

fectured by it going forward. The only other thing I can think of that it was like, was the Second World War: the films on one side of it and then the films on the other side of it, how it completely warped and changed the whole public outlook and you couldn’t ignore what had just happened.” 🧟





Fried Barry

BATTER UP

FRIED BARRY

Starring Gary Green, Channele de Jager
and Sean Cameron Michael
Written and directed by Ryan Kruger
Enigma Ace Films

It's just another day in Cape Town, South Africa, for dear ol' Barry (Gary Green) as the film opens on an unassuming scene of his family gathered around the kitchen table. However, before the lowlife bastard can finish his greasy breakfast, he disowns his family, runs off to the bar, sticks a needle full of junk in his arm, and gets abducted by aliens during his walk back to

nowhere. After undergoing vile acts of unspeakable torture (anal probing is the least of which), his body is taken over and sent back to Earth where the real fun begins. This newly possessed Barry is all too eager to stomp on the proverbial accelerator of life as fast as his debauch-

ery-fuelled heart will allow. His frenetic trip takes him to places unknown and puts him in situations that would make the Devil blush. It doesn't take long to realize Barry's idea of a good time is not set to mortal standards, or even human ones.

A psychedelic score blending discotheque, grindhouse, and old school horror converges with over-the-top practical and CGI effects for

a truly unique mindfuck of an experience that you'll not soon forget. Whatever crevice of the world Gary Green was pulled from, he's clearly born to play Barry despite having next to no acting experience outside of the short upon which this feature is based. There's no denying Green's flawless execution of applying physical animation to tell Barry's sordid tale with minimal dialogue. Barry's soon-to-be-widowed wife Suz (Channele de Jager) is an unexpected curveball of sweetness amid the stark depravity, injecting some genuine heart into her degenerate hubby's downward spiral into hell.

Go ahead and indulge in this feast of sex, drugs, violence, and oh yeah, saving the children. If ever there was a cult-destined film you must see to believe, *Fried Barry* is unequivocally that film.

RICK HIPSON

CREATIVE JUICES

BLOODTHIRSTY

Starring Lauren Beatty, Greg Bryk, and Katharine King So
Directed by Amelia Moses
Written by Wendy Hill-Tout and Lowell
Brainstorm Media

Lycanthropy has been utilized as a metaphor for many things over the course of its screen history, and *Bloodthirsty* adds the creative urge to the list. With Canadian singer-songwriter Lowell contributing original songs and co-scripting with her mom Wendy Hill-Tout, there's an authenticity underpinning the horrors as its heroine is led to

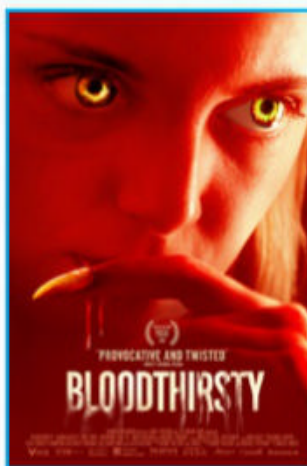
unleash her artistic beast.

Musician Grey (Lauren Beatty) is striving for success, but remains creatively blocked. She is also using drugs to keep bloody, frightening, animalistic hallucinations at bay. When producer Vaughn Daniels (Greg Bryk) takes an interest in her and offers to produce her second album, she accepts his invitation to write and record it with him at his remote, wintry mansion. Never mind that murder in his past; he was acquitted, but Grey's partner Charlie (Katharine King So), who tags along, is suspicious. Vaughn convinces Grey to go off her meds, which will, needless to say, have dangerous ramifications,

but the writers and director Amelia Moses aren't going for your basic rock 'n' roll monster movie.

Instead, they and Beatty present a portrait of an artist who finds herself while tapping into her dark side. The songs Grey composes under Vaughn's fearsome guidance are full of yearning and torment, reminiscent in that sense of Paul Williams' tunes from *Phantom of the Paradise* – a movie that *Bloodthirsty* otherwise hardly resembles. There are moments of rapacious gore and physical transformation that fully plant the film in the horror camp, though it's most intriguing and involving as an examination of self-discovery leading down shadowy paths. Beatty and So have a warm rapport that makes it clear what Grey is losing as Charlie is forced away from her, and Beatty and Bryk perform an engrossing dance that may lead to death.

MICHAEL GINGOLD



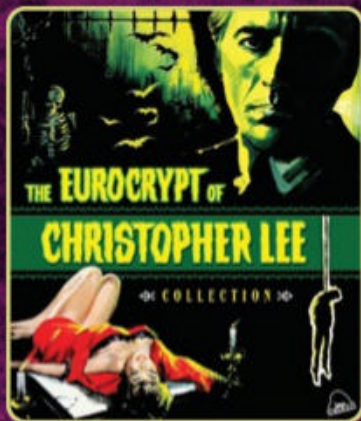
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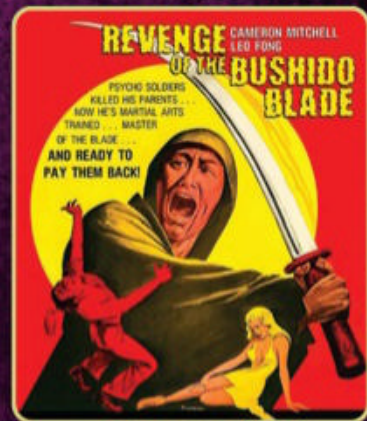
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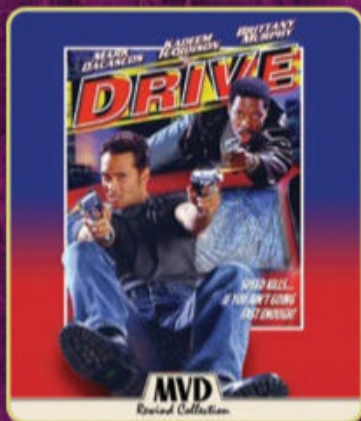
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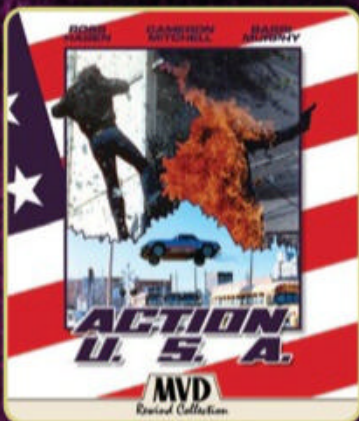
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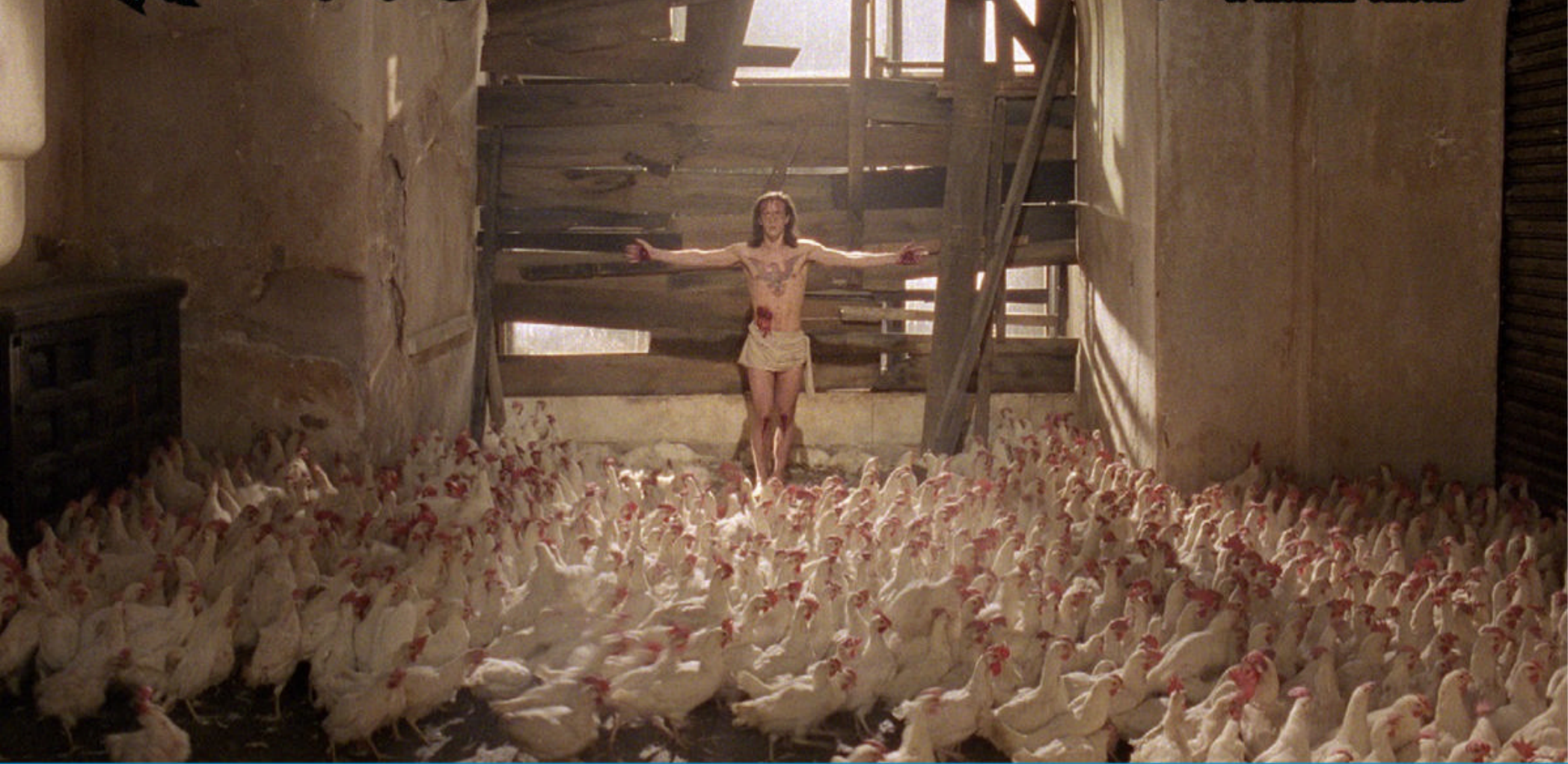
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REISSUED & REANIMATED

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD



SEVERIN'S SANTA SANGRE 4-DISC DIGIPACK

"To me, *Santa Sangre* is the crown jewel of the Severin Films catalog," says company president David Gregory. "It's my favourite movie that we've put out – and that's saying something, because I love most of the films we've released. And don't get me wrong, I love *El Topo* and *The Holy Mountain*, but to me, *Santa Sangre* is Alejandro Jodorowsky's best and most accessible movie."

That latter term might seem an odd one to apply to the carnival of avant-garde, grotesque, and Freudian delights that is *Santa Sangre*. Scripted by the director, producer Claudio Argento, and Robert Leoni, it follows a young man, Fenix (played by Jodorowsky's son Axel), who escapes from an asylum to literally serve as the murderous arms of his mother, whose own limbs were lopped off by her unfaithful husband. A lengthy flashback shows us Fenix as a child (here portrayed by Adán Jodorowsky) and his bloody family history amidst a circus full of oddities, which also includes a lengthy and gruesome elephant's funeral. Yet *Santa Sangre* is still more narratively straightforward than Jodorowsky's aforementioned 1970s output, and won the director a new generation of fans when it was first released in Europe in 1989 and the U.S. the following year.

All the film's sanguinary, sexual, and surreal sights are now on their best display thanks to Severin's just-released 4K Ultra HD disc, pack-

aged with a soundtrack CD and two Blu-rays (also available separately). The boxed set arrives a decade after Severin's previous Blu-ray of the movie, and Gregory admits this to be a corrective move.

"I never loved the transfer on that disc, which was supervised by the director of photography [Daniele Nannuzzi]," he allows. "He drained a lot of the colour out of it, and I remember it being a very colourful film when I saw it theatrically. Once UHD came in, there were only a few films we wanted to test the waters with in that format, because it still hasn't truly caught on, and it's certainly not a format that's conducive to movies that are old, or shot on 16mm, or have specific looks that wouldn't work in 4K. But *Santa Sangre* is definitely one of those films we've always wanted to revisit."

Jodorowsky, however, was not part of this process: "Having worked with him before, we know he's not that keen on going backwards, and he didn't really respond when we first approached him about being involved," says Gregory.

That changed after the fresh transfer was

given a 30th-anniversary, Halloween-night premiere screening at the 2019 Morbido Fest in Mexico City, where the movie was shot. Known for their elaborate presentations, the *Santa Sangre* event incorporated a full-size replica of the elephant's coffin and a live performance by composer Simon Boswell. The director wasn't present, but Adán was, "and he called his dad afterward and told him it looked fantastic, but he should check it out because there were some

things he thought should be different. So then I got a call from Jodo, who said he wanted to supervise and approve a colour grade in a facility in Paris. Which was absolutely great, of course, but he was 92 and it was right at the beginning of COVID when we had this conversation. So it was like, how do we get a 92-year-old into a colour suite in Paris without endangering his life?

"But we worked it out, and it was with the same colourist who did *El Topo* and *The Holy Mountain* recently, and it looks phenomenal. Of course, the tools are very different now when you're doing digital colour correction than they were when you had to do it photochemically, in the answer-print process. So he was able to actually pull more colour out



of it without George Lucas-ing the thing, you know? He didn't change or add anything to the film element, but he was able to tweak it in ways that wouldn't have been possible in 1989. It is now the official Jodorowsky-approved version of *Santa Sangre*, for the first time on home video."

Not only approved, but very much appreciated, according to Gregory.

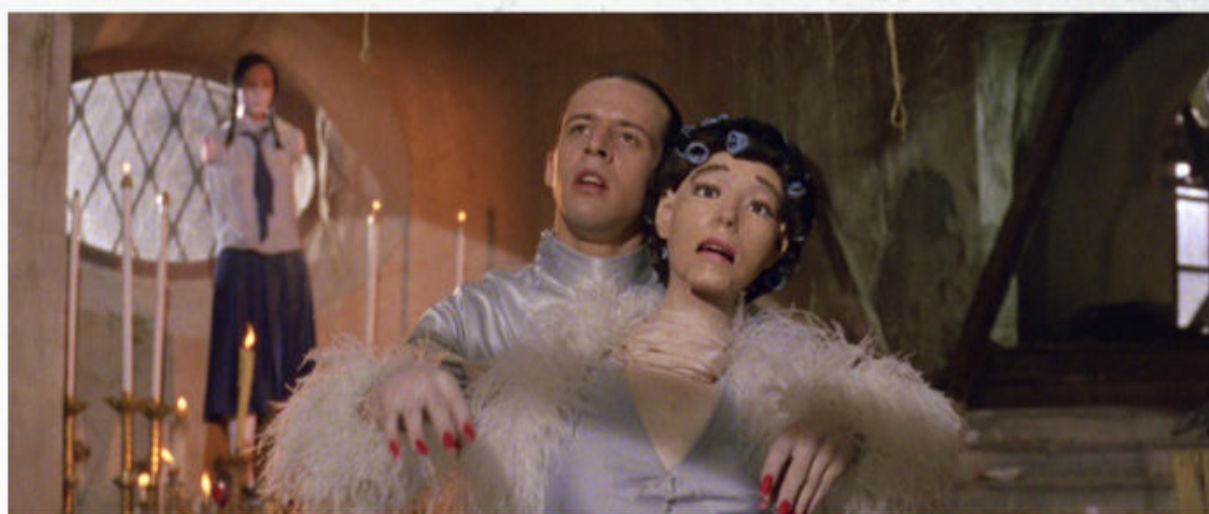
"Jodorowsky said it was a whole new experience watching it again, and it's now a brand new movie to him. He hadn't actually seen *Santa Sangre* in quite some time; it's painful for him to watch, because all three of his sons are in it and one of them [Teo Jodorowsky, who plays a pimp in the film] died several years after it was made. But now he was able to go back and watch it again, so he's got a whole new perspective, and it was quite a special thing to have him involved. You're talking about a major cinematic artist, as far as we're concerned, and why would you not spend the money and put the effort into making that happen?"

The filmmaker talks about his new views on *Santa Sangre* in a lengthy on-camera interview, conducted at his Paris home, that's part of the disc set's huge supplemental package. Severin's previous Blu-ray was already fully loaded, containing Gregory's feature-length documentary *Forget Everything You Have Ever Seen: The World of "Santa Sangre,"* commentary by Jodorowsky and genre journalist Alan Jones, a featurette on the real-life spree killer who inspired the film's story, and lots more.

"But of course, we wanted to up the ante; that's something Severin likes to do," Gregory says. "So we have a few hours of new stuff, in addition to the several hours of extras we did the first time round. We have several of the Italian contingent newly interviewed, not least Claudio Argento, who considers it his finest work – which, when you look at his filmography, is saying something. He gave a very in-depth interview about the hows and whys and wherefores of putting this movie together. We've got new interviews with the executive producer [Angelo Iacono], the DP, the editor [Mauro Bonanni], and the co-screenwriter, and a video from Morbido."

Fortunately, they were able to beat the pandemic when capturing these onscreen chats.

"It was right before the COVID era, so we had



them in the can beforehand. That has proved challenging in the past year, to do the amount of extras we've wanted to do in general. But we've managed."

Coincidentally, the new edition of *Santa Sangre* hit the marketplace only a month after Severin's Ultra HD/Blu-ray editions of *The Day of the Beast* and *Perdita Durango*, a pair of '90s favourites from another master of extreme Spanish-language horror, Álex de la Iglesia.

"We'd been working on all of those titles for a while," Gregory notes, "and they just happened to reach the finish line around the same time. And I have to say, the fact that Alex just made this epic with *30 Coins* on HBO really bodes well for what people are commissioning at the moment, because it's basically like a Lucio Fulci movie but with a huge budget. It's full of crazy, blasphemous imagery, monsters, splatter, all the iconography that we expect from European

horror."

It was the same freedom Jodorowsky enjoyed, to let his mind explode all over the celluloid canvas, that makes *Santa Sangre* such an enduring achievement, Gregory believes.

"I love the fact that he was essentially hired by Dario Argento's brother to make the kind of film that was their stock in trade, the kind of film that they could sell – i.e., a nasty thriller," he says. "They gave a surrealist the bones like that, and he hung and dressed whatever he wanted to onto those bones, and it produced something quite special. *Santa Sangre* is, in its essence, a horror film, a slasher film, yet it's so full of that phantasmagoria of Jodorowsky imagery and symbolism, and everything that makes him what we love, so for me, it's just beautiful. I wish somebody would give him a romcom to make, or something like that, to see what would come out the other end!"

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CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT



DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

Gargoyles

by John W. Bowen

We all have a few of these lurking in the delete bins of our souls: movies and/or TV shows that enthralled us as kids but shrivel under the jaundiced gaze of adulthood. It's a lament I've heard from many a horror fan about *Maximum Overdrive*, *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark*, *The Legend of Boggy Creek*, and any number of second-string *kaiju*. (Okay, the god[zilla]awful *Son of Godzilla* even pissed me off as a nine-year-old, but I was already a jaded little shit.) Of course, this isn't confined to the horror genre; for some years post-puberty, I remained convinced that the Monkees were a real band and was moved by the gritty realism of *Sarah T.: Portrait of a Teenage Alcoholic*.

However, I'm an odd exception when it comes to 1972's *Gargoyles*, simply because I didn't see it until now. I'm not sure what I wound up watching instead the night it premiered, but the next day, when all the other fifth-graders were breathlessly testifying that *Gargoyles* was absolutely the scariest shit ever, I could only sit on the schoolyard sidelines (pre-home-vid and even-more-pre-YouTube) and hope to catch a rerun sometime before my twenties. Well, my twenties and thirties (and a bit more) came and went before I was able to clamp the old glazballs on *Gargoyles*, but in recent years I'd already heard from many an adult (including most of the *Rue Morgue* staff) that the film didn't exactly age like cognac. I adjusted my expectations accordingly and waded in.

After a preamble/voice-over/montage of gargoyle lore, we meet our principals as they embark on a road trip in the American Southwest. Anthropologist Dr. Mercer Boley (Cornel Wilde) and his daughter Diana (Jennifer Salt, fresh off *Sisters* and destined for *Midnight Cowboy* and *American Horror Story*, with a couple of *Love Boats* in between) are driving to Mexico to research his current project, a book on demonology. But they've pencilled in a brief detour to visit one of those desert roadside museums (you know, the ones that exist to thicken horror movie plots) because the proprietor (Woody Chambliss) of Willie's Desert Museum and Reptile Emporium claims to possess an artefact that Boley won't be



able to pass up.

As night falls, a booze-soaked Willie shows the travellers his latest find: an oversized, winged biped skeleton he claims is foretold in Native Indian folklore (another popular 1970s plot thickener). To Willie's crapulent indignation, Boley scoffs, derides and poooops the claim, accusing Willie of assembling his find from animal remains. But while the academic is still in mid-poopoo, Willie's shed is attacked from outside by unseen assailants; the place collapses and the old goat is killed while Boley and Diana narrowly escape with their lives and the crypto-critter's skull.

After their station wagon is attacked on the highway by said-same assailants – now revealed to be gargoyles! – they elect to call it a night, leave their car at a service station and check into the adjacent motel. Fools! They should have kept on truckin', because the next 24 hours bring even more gargoyle attacks, as well as the introduction of bikers (including a young, pre-craggy Scott Glenn), bumbling cops, and the abduction of Diana by the 'goyle-in-chief (Bernie Casey?!). About a dozen of the titular rubber-suited beasts appear throughout the film and while one applauds the de-

signers for giving each its own distinct look, they're tied together by looking so uniformly shitty. The director and/or producers seem to have thought slo-mo action sequences would alleviate the problem. It really, really didn't.

In fact, being so reliant on its creature effects makes *Gargoyles* an odd exception to certain rules of made-for-TV horror. These quickie flicks generally eschewed monsters – at least any elaborately designed ones – in favour of hauntings, satanic cults, serial killers, vampires, aliens (provided they could pass as human), possessed house pets (*Devil Dog: The Hound of Hell*), and the occasional possessed bulldozer (*Killdozer*). (Unsurprisingly, *Gargoyles*' original director is said to have bailed over the producers' refusal to funnel more cash into the effects budget.) More's the pity, because while *Gargoyles* has had multiple home-vid

reissues since the late 1980s, many more made-for-TV cult faves remain available only as bootlegs.

Underwhelmed as the recent viewing experience may have left me, at least it didn't destroy a treasured childhood memory. Now get the hell out of my basement and don't come back without my sense of wonder. (Check the dumpsters first.)



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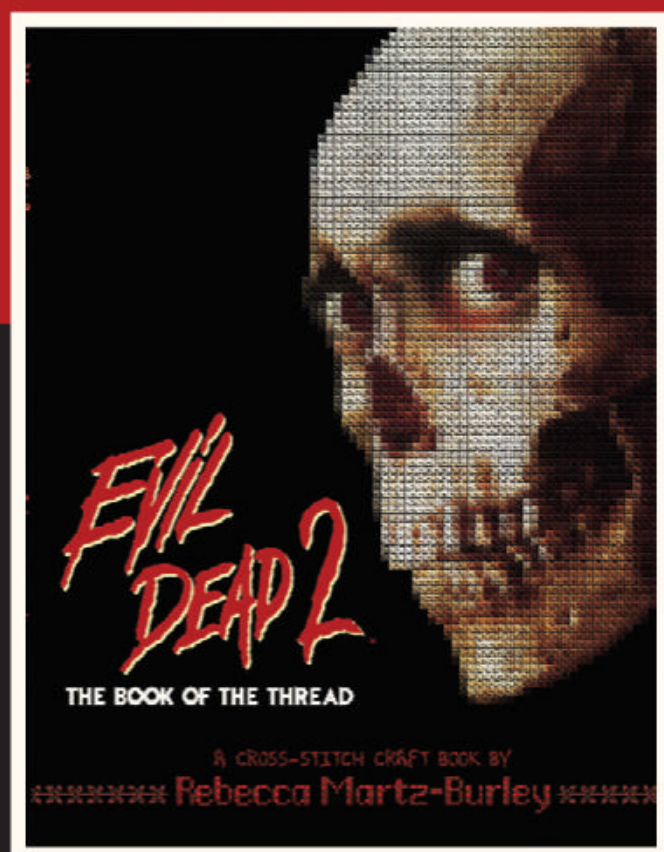
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FILES FROM THE BLACK MUSEUM

THE LONG SHADOWS OF CLASSIC HORROR'S PAST

BY PAUL CORUPE

Living on Video

"THE TIME TRAVELERS IS AN INTERESTING SCI-FI/HORROR HYBRID THAT IS SURPRISINGLY FORWARD-THINKING IN DEPICTING HOW WE CURRENTLY INTERACT WITH OUR MANY VIDEO SCREENS."

One of the hardest parts about the ongoing pandemic has been the way that we've had no choice but to live more and more of our lives through our video screens. From the impersonal interface of virtual work meetings to attending online-only festivals and even logging in for doctor's appointments, many of us spend a good chunk of our days talking at a screen, often about things we saw on one of our other many screens. And while the phones, tablets, laptop screens, and 4K TVs that constantly surround us may be a poor substitute for real experiences, you can't deny that they have also provided digital windows of escape to help us cope with loneliness and lockdowns. Our increasingly dependent relationship with digital displays is uncannily predicted in *The Time Travelers* (1964), a recent Blu-ray release from Kino Lorber that anticipates how we use screens today, both to interact with reality and to break away from it.

The film begins as scientists Dr. von Steiner (Preston Foster), Dr. Connors (Philip Carey), and Dr. White (Merry Anders) succeed in projecting a scene from the far-flung year of 2071 on a viewscreen in their university laboratory. But it's not just a video image – clumsy technician Danny (Steve Franken) accidentally steps into the screen and suddenly appears in the barren future landscape. The other scientists follow, only to see their time portal unexpectedly close, putting them at the mercy of a mob of hideous mutated men out for blood. Taking refuge in a cave, the group discover a small band of human survivors and their strange android servants, led by the mysterious Dr. Varno (John Hoyt). Varno explains that they were driven into seclusion by a nuclear war and persistent attacks by the surface-dwelling mutants. Now, an impending food shortage has the remaining humans preparing a space transport to relocate to the nearby Alpha Centauri system. But with no more room on the rocket, the scientists realize that they must find their own way back to their present.

Shot in bright '60s mod colours and with distinctive magic show special effects, *The Time Travelers* is an interesting sci-fi/horror hybrid that is surprisingly forward-thinking in depicting how we currently interact with our many video screens. Made at a time when most viewers had only recently



acquired their first TV set, *The Time Travelers'* self-reflexive narrative sometimes feels like a Russian nesting doll – as audience members, we watch a screen that depicts people from our past, who use a screen as a gateway to their future, where they discover even more people who use even more screens to ensure their continuing survival.

In the film, we see how the scientists and the post-apocalyptic underground dwellers each maintain a unique relationship with video images. For Dr. Varno's survivors, who have self-isolated in cramped underground cubicles to

avoid the dangers of the surface world, the many video monitors not only provide a way to safely interact with their reality, they also provide comforting images of hope for the future. In addition to using video monitors to keep tabs on the mutants in case of attack, Varno shows the scientists an impressive wall of video displays focused on different planets and star clusters – a whole galaxy mapped out in video signals – where they conduct their search for more habitable worlds. Even the rocket ship, Varno's ultimate symbol of escape to a better life, can only be observed via a remote video feed of some nearby launch pad – a distant and almost intangible path forward.

Perhaps even more relevant is the way that the film depicts screens as portals to new worlds and perspectives, which has some interesting parallels to our modern interactions. In *The Time Travelers*, the scientists pass through a video image to a future world where they gain new insights on the atomic threats of their own era. Similarly, we've all used screens as gateways to new realms while stuck at home this past year, whether it's to revisit the cinematic universes of our favourite films or to explore open-world video games. And just like the film's scientists reach their own revelations, our experiences within these portals can help deepen our understanding of our current lives and modern issues. After all, that's the very premise of this column – sometimes, simply spending an hour or two watching a creaky old horror film can provide us with new insights that are still relevant today. Far from being archaic, these classic movies and the ideas that they can spark within us are excitingly timeless. 🧐

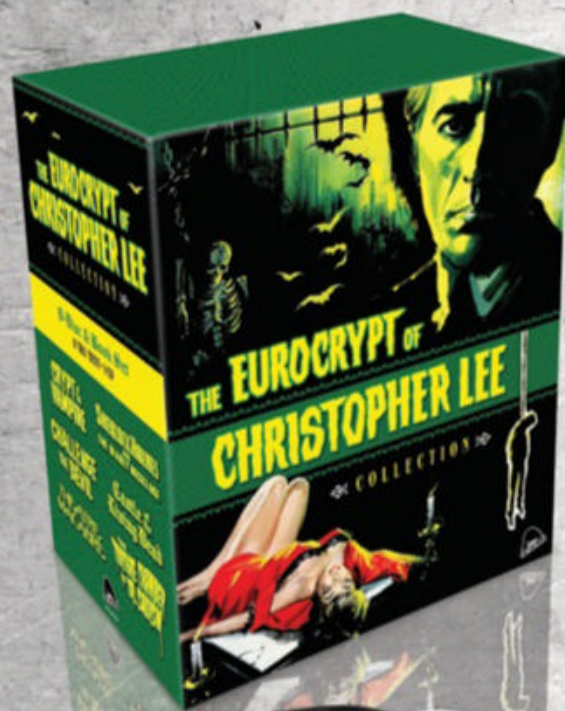


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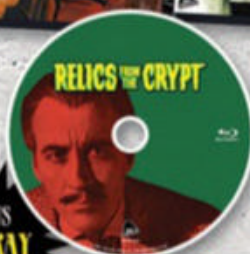
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Source Point Press

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BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

Rich Davis' *Cult of Dracula* draws inspiration from Stoker's original work, but it's far from a simple retelling: a fact that's obvious right from the opening sequence, where the reader is witness to the bloody aftermath of a mass suicide at The House of the Rising Sun. The secluded compound is home to the secretive Ordo Dracul cult, and the gruesome remains of the men, women, and children found there are more likely to bring to mind real-world atrocities such as the Jonestown massacre than vampires. However, there is a connection.

"Cult leaders are a lot like vampires; they feed off of the blind devotion of their followers," explains Davis. "Their power comes from their ability to make otherwise innocent people do horrendous things. Jim Jones convinced dozens of parents that it was better to poison their children than to let them leave his church. It just made sense to bring these concepts together in *Cult of Dracula*. It's a story about how we can convince ourselves something is normal no matter how weird the rest of the world sees it."

Hoping to document the truth behind the Ordo

Dracul are students Mina and Jonathan, along with their teacher Van Helsing. Visiting the compound prior to the massacre, the crew plan to interview the cult's enigmatic leader, Robert Renfield, and some of its members, including Arthur and his girlfriend Lucy. Instead, they set off a chain reaction that will force Mina to confront her own past, leading inevitably to a bloodbath. Fans of Stoker will recognize these names, though these characters only vaguely resemble their literary antecedents. The largest departure from the original tale, however, is reserved for the lead character himself. Or rather, herself.

Presenting Dracula as female wasn't an arbitrary decision on the part of the writer, nor a gimmicky cosmetic change for the sake of being different. Rather, it was an idea birthed when Davis had exhausted his research into vampire mythologies and failed to find something genuinely inspirational.

"I started to research other myths, legends, and scary stories... even nursery rhymes," he says. "I noticed I was consistently encountering the same character in many of these stories. A woman, a dark woman, who was cast out of society; haunted the shadows; stole naughty children from their beds. She sustained herself with their blood or essence. The Wendigo, La Llorona, Lady Bathory, Lamia, and so many more. I began to ask myself what would happen if I tied these stories together. What if this wasn't many women, but rather one woman? What if all of these stories were about how different people from different periods in history perceived her?"

These tweaks aside, Davis believes that *Cult of Dracula* is simply continuing many of the themes presented by Stoker in his original novel.

"*Dracula* is a biting critique on the hypocritical attitudes towards sex and sexuality that he believed were pervasive in Victorian society," he says. "Stoker's women represent what we desire



Cult Of Dracula: Rich Davis' new take on the classic Stoker tale recasts characters around a destructive cult.

and fear about women, especially women with power. I wanted to explore these avenues as well and I began by imbuing each of my characters with the same basic roles and qualities as Stoker: Lucy lets things happen; Mina makes them happen; the Brides symbolize empowered femininity taken to the utmost, uninhibited extreme. From there, I set out to explore their development arcs through the lens of how and why we find each of these aspects so terrifying in women. There are no 'damsels in distress' in *Cult of Dracula*. These women have agency. They're not victims. They make choices. They deal with consequences. That makes them scary." 🧛‍♀️

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#1



QUICK CUTS

Hellboy's sporadic and often non-linear publication history may have frustrated fans in the short term, but it has proven valuable for the franchise's longevity. Huge pockets of the character's history remain unexplored, so when a series like *Young Hellboy: The Hidden Land* comes along, it's less a cynical cash grab than another valuable piece to the puzzle. Lil' Hellboy and his surrogate father Professor Bruttenholm are on their way to a South American dig site when their plane goes down, stranding them on an island facing giant crabs, monster apes, and dinosaurs. It's always a treat to see Hellboy and Bruttenholm interact and this story provides another glimpse into their relationship, while Hellboy's childlike wonder makes a strong counterpart to the adult version we're more familiar with. Of course, it wouldn't be a *Hellboy* comic without adding to the overall mythos, and the surprise appearance of a new character certainly hints the series' roster will continue to grow.



It's to Scott Snyder's credit as a writer that he fills *Nocterra* with familiar tropes and still manages to come up with a story that's fresh and exciting. It's ten years after the "Big PM," when the world was plunged into everlasting night and any creature caught in the dark for more than a few hours began to mutate into monstrous shades. Now, only pockets of civilization remain in brightly lit outposts, with people and supplies being transported by "ferrymen" in giant eighteen-wheeler trucks. Val Riggs is one such ferryman who has sworn to keep her little brother safe no matter the cost,



and so agrees to undertake a potentially hazardous assignment. Channelling everything from zombie movies to *Mad Max*, *Nocterra* works primarily because Val is a strong and relatable character, providing the reader with a good snapshot of this post-apocalyptic world and an emotional hook that propels the tale beyond clichés.

I've always heard that Hollywood is a cutthroat town, but *Hollywood Trash* adds a whole new dimension to the phrase. Two local garbagemen, James and Billy, have unknowingly become targets of The Privy Council, an elite cabal headed by Tinseltown's top mogul, Grapevine. At his disposal are some of Hollywood's top entertain-

ers, whose successes are all linked to their leader's mysterious powers and who are compelled to do whatever he asks, including kill. Soon James and Billy are dodging aerial assassins, giant remote-controlled mecha, and a killer crocodile wearing a dress. That last one probably tipped you off that the book's tone isn't entirely serious, and indeed, most of it is played for laughs, including the last-minute revelation of Grapevine's true motives. It's all a very silly but fun ride that never becomes tiresome, due to its quirky characters and slick art by Pablo Verdugo.



The first half of *Stray Dogs* #1 reads like a heartwarming Disney cartoon classic. Little Sophie is a rescue dog who finds herself taken in by a dog lover and placed in a home that shelters several canines. Not knowing how she found herself in this predicament, Sophie is at first wracked by anxiety even as she is befriended by Rusty, the lead dog who shows her around and takes her under his paw. It's only as she begins to make herself at home that Sophie remembers: her previous owner was murdered by the man who is now her guardian. It's a curve ball that instantly flips a family-friendly fable



onto its terrifying tail. Trish Forstner's art helps immensely with the initial illusion, with a style that hearkens to *Lady and the Tramp* and *101 Dalmations*. But there are more than enough hints to indicate that these dogs will soon be heading down a very dark alley.

Wolvenheart puts a new spin to the monster-hunter genre by throwing in a time-travel element. Working for the eponymous organization, led by Professor Van Helsing, Sterling Cross monitors time streams and quickly dispatches with any monstrous anomalies that might alter history. Unfortunately, that's exactly what happens when the legendary Elizabeth Bathory infiltrates and destroys the organization. Trapped in an alternate timeline, Sterling fights to put his history back on track, but first he must tell friend from foe, and unravel an ancient plan put into motion by Dracula himself. Though theoretically able to travel to any point in time, the bulk of the story takes place circa Victorian London and takes full advantage of the era's characters, both historical and fictional. Side trips to other countries add a welcome splash of colour and diversity, ensuring that Sterling has more than just the usual vampires and werewolves to contend with. 🧛‍♀️



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DEVIL'S ADVOCATES: DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS

Kat Ellinger

Liverpool University Press

The prospect of reviewing an academic text that dissects a horror film as beloved as 1971's *Daughters of Darkness* is not, by definition, a treat. After all, the majority of scholarly film writing I've reviewed within these pages has been as dry as corpse dust. Fortunately, British film writer/podcaster/editor Kat Ellinger understands this and ensures her entry into Auteur Publishing's *Devil's Advocates* series (which examines classic horror films) is far from bloodless.

Harry Kümel's movie is most assuredly a classic, one whose influences Ellinger traces back through not only vampire (and more specifically, lesbian vampire) film history but the Gothic and Decadent literary traditions, fairy tales, and the works of the Marquis de Sade. She also explores the history of Elizabeth Báthory (the real-life Hungarian noblewoman whose bloody deeds inspired actress Delphine Seyrig's character Countess Bathory) and the film's production.

The latter is bolstered by original and illuminating interviews with Kümel and Canadian star Danielle Ouimet, who plays innocent young bride Valerie whom the Countess seduces away from her cruel new husband Stefan (John Karlen). Kümel recounts the usual challenges of producer interference and a lack of time and money, while Ouimet is particularly forthcoming about Kümel's on-set cruelty towards her, as well as his odd sexual cluelessness (typified by his consulting a sex manual to block her love scene with Karlen).

Ellinger's deep knowledge of the Gothic – long on display on her aptly titled *Daughters of Darkness* film podcast – as well as cult and horror cinema, acquits her well here, as does her engaging and accessible writing. Rather than trying to impress

with intellectual arguments drawn from esoteric French philosophy, she draws reasonable (and readable) conclusions from literature, history, and film. The result sheds much light on *Darkness*.

SEAN PLUMMER

OF ONE BLOOD

Pauline Hopkins

Poisoned Pen Press

Spanning years, deserts, and an ocean, *Of One Blood* is part science fiction novel, part adventure tale, and overall an excellent introduction to early Black genre writing.

The original, serialized version of *Of One Blood*, written by prominent writer/journalist Pauline Hopkins, appeared in *The Colored American Magazine* from 1902 to 1903. While the name of the story's magazine of origin might give readers pause, it is only the first taste of antiquated racial attitudes and terminology in this tense and exciting novel.

The book largely follows the adventures of med student Reule Briggs. A poor man of unclear origins who is surrounded by Boston's wealth and Harvard's elitism, Reule is filled with ennui and has little to look forward to. That is, until he sees Dianthe Lusk sing on stage one night, after being dragged to a concert by his friend Aubrey Livingston. Dianthe haunts him, at times literally, and through chance he is given

the opportunity to raise her from the dead with his newly forged medical methods.

Hopkins gives nods to horror's godmother, Mary Shelley, in more areas than the initial set-up. Quotes from Milton and other poets round out the dense prose of *Of One Blood*, but never to the point of inscrutability. The book also pivots strongly into an African adventure, including lost civilizations that the new introduction aptly labels as "proto-Wakanda."

Though some of the language will be jarring to modern readers, along with the racism, sexism, and classism, *Of One Blood* is a fascinating peek

into that era's notions of mesmerism and African history. Despite the mishmash of genres and the tale's fantastical trials, the persistence of theme and message are undeniable. Horror and science fiction have always been about challenging art and politics, and *Of One Blood* emphasizes how deep those roots run.

DEIRDRE CRIMMINS

FROM THE INNER MIND TO ... THE OUTER LIMITS: SCRIPTS OF JOSEPH STEFANO, VOLUME 1

Dave Rash, ed.

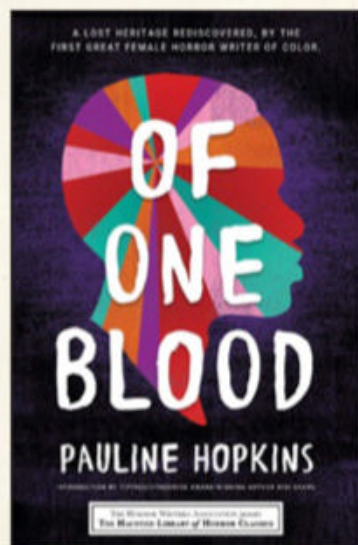
Gauntlet Press

This limited collection perfectly captures Joseph Stefano's visionary style with selected scripts from the original *Outer Limits* TV series compiled in print for the first time. The book presents six produced scripts from first-season episodes, several of which can frequently be found on fan-favourite lists, including "The Zanti Misfits," "It Crawled Out of the Woodwork," and "A Feasibility Study." Also included are two unproduced scripts: an early version of "Forms of Things Unknown," where the form takes a more prominent role than the insidious entity merely hinted at in the aired episode, and "Small Wonder – Part II."

Dominic Stefano kicks the book off with an intimate

glimpse into his dad's outlook on humanity and the strong connection he had with the show and its viewership. Editor Dave Rash then gives a passionate prologue breaking down each script contained within. He eloquently highlights the various themes, symbolism, and layered perspectives that make the scenes resonate even decades later, allowing the episodes to remain as relevant to our current state of global affairs as when Stefano first wrote them in the 1960s.

While immersed in the writer's uniquely Gothic world, you can expect to be transported to a place where multiple generations of imaginations were entertained and stretched beyond the fringes of possibility. Whether you're a lifelong *Outer Limits* fan or an aspiring screenwriter, this treasure trove of scripts illustrates how an iconic slice of televised history was shaped with





From *The Inner Mind To... The Outer Limits*: "It Crawled Out of the Woodwork."

a minimalistic prowess that hammered home a sense of mystified dread with each stroke of blunt-force description and brooding atmosphere. Rounding out the collection are several screenshots from each respective episode.

With a second volume already in the works, prepare to adjust your picture to the sights and sounds of your inner mind with a deep dive into *The Outer Limits*... and beyond.

RICK HIPSON

IN THAT ENDLESSNESS, OUR END

Gemma Files
Grimscribe Press

Insidious is the word: that's how most of the terrors operate in the latest collection from one of Canada's leading horror writers, Gemma Files. Seemingly small, innocuous, even mundane events lead up to grim revelations. They rarely assume global proportions, like the apocalypse of doppelgängers who gruesomely leave the bodies of their originals in "This is How It Goes," or even large-scale mayhem, as when Canadians of Latvian descent invoke their Elder in the woods in "Look Up."

More often, the "evil" remains hidden by the story's end, unrecognized by most and barely understood even by its immediate victims. Problems with a light bulb in a new apartment lead to the discovery of something sentient in the electric circuit in "Bulb." Innocent mental experiments (psychological in "Sleep Hygiene," artistic in "Venio") create threatening realities that are hard to exorcize. Strange smells and voices, "Always After Three" in the night, apparently summon something in a nearby apartment. In "The Puppet Motel," there's a room that makes you feel uncomfortable for no obvious reason. Yet, at its root is no classical haunting, just as in other tales one would look in vain for done-to-death ghosts, vampires, or zombies. Instead, one encounters things sinister, insidious, and hard to pinpoint.

The world is not populated by monsters in Files' stories – the world is the monster. Her characters were hurt, already half-defeated through family or bad relationships, even before the world starts showing its ugly face. This hefty volume (fifteen tales on 330 pages) contains horrors which are not escapist, but quite confrontational, existential, and relatable. As Thomas Ligotti said, "We may hide from horror only in the heart of horror." This book offers first-rate evidence of that stratagem.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

DISPOSSESSED

Piper Mejia
IFWG Publishing

Family and community – and the dangers that lie within and without – are much of what fuels this young adult novel, which kicks off when "dangerous" sixteen-year-old foster kid Slate is uprooted from his life in America and relocated to New Zealand, where he allegedly has family.

DANTE'S PICK



GOBLIN: A NOVEL IN SIX NOVELLAS A HOUSE AT THE BOTTOM OF A LAKE

Josh Malerman
Del Rey

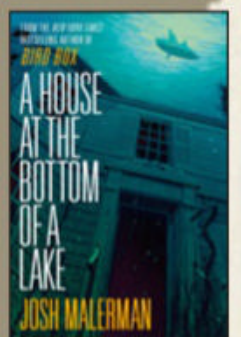
Two books spotlighting Josh Malerman's shorter works, previously only available in small press editions, have now been reissued by Del Rey. Both illustrate that the creativity evidenced in the author's novels is no fluke and that he's just as capable a storyteller when working in more constrained formats.

Goblin is a book about a place: Goblin, Michigan. It rains all the time there, and if you believe the locals, there's a witch that lives in the North Woods along with the legendary Great Owls.

Goblin is the destination of truck driver Tom in the book's wraparound tale. He's been tasked with an unsettling delivery with some very unusual instructions. Between the start of Tom's journey on the opening pages and its end, *Goblin* is the setting for six other stories, including "A Man in Slices" about the macabre ends to which a desperate suitor will go; "Kamp," concerning one Walter Kamp, who fears nothing more than being scared to death; "Happy Birthday, Hunter" in which *Goblin*'s most decorated hunter makes a fateful decision to hunt that which should not be hunted; "Presto," about a magician's deal with pitch-dark forces; and more. As the title suggests, together these tales form a cohesive, engrossing picture of a place that any horror fan would do well to visit.

The second reissue, *A House at the Bottom of a Lake*, offers a different kind of destination: a mysterious submerged house in a murky lake, discovered by a pair of curious seventeen-year-olds on a first date. The house and its nonsensical physics quickly become an obsession for the teens, despite the increasing signs of danger and inhabitation. The sunken structure could be viewed as a metaphor of the thrills, chills, fears, and regrets of first, fumbling love, or simply the site of a ripping horror tale about darkness lurking beneath the waves. Either way, both titles are waterlogged, appropriately haunting, and perfect summer reads.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



WRITTEN MORE THAN TWO CENTURIES
AGO, JI YUN'S "TRUE WEIRD STORIES"
PROVE THAT HUMANITY'S GREATEST
FEARS ARE TIMELESS

Spectres From the East

BY
MONICA S. KUEBLER

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN IN THESE PAGES ABOUT JAPANESE AND KOREAN HORROR, MUCH LESS ABOUT CHINA'S GENRE OUTPUT. Scholars [Yi Izzy Yu](#) and [John Yu Branscum](#), both big fans of East Asian supernatural and metaphysical horror, noticed something similar: Chinese horror remains largely unknown in the West, despite its outsized influence on the region. They seek to change that with a new translated collection from Ji Yun, once considered one of China's most famous purveyors of *zhiguai* or "true weird stories," a genre with a complex, more than 2000-year history.

"We love Ji Yun," Yu and Branscum explain in a collaborative email interview. "His mind, his writing, his sense of humour, his back story. And although only a fraction of the over 1200 tales he authored are weird tales or horror, they cover almost every type there is, all the while developing the mythology of key Chinese horror figures, such as the Chinese vampire, the *sha*, and the substitute ghost. To boot, he shares some really fascinating and brilliantly told early examples of paranormal encounters: alien abductions, a yeti tale, spirit possession, etc. He's just absolutely central to understanding Chinese horror, and the Chinese weird."

While unknown to most Westerners, in his homeland Ji Yun is as ubiquitous as Poe or Lovecraft are here — a writer who has become a character himself and continues to make his way into others' stories. Born in 1724, he was considered a child genius, which afforded him a top education. Over the course of his life, he held several high-ranking government positions including Special Advisor to the Emperor and Chief Editor/Librarian of the largest library project in Chinese history. He also had a deep fascination with the supernatural.

"Ji Yun had first-hand paranormal experiences and writing about them, as well as the experiences of others, was a way of him working through these experiences and their metaphysical implications," the co-translators explain. "He was [also] a staunch advocate against the tendency of

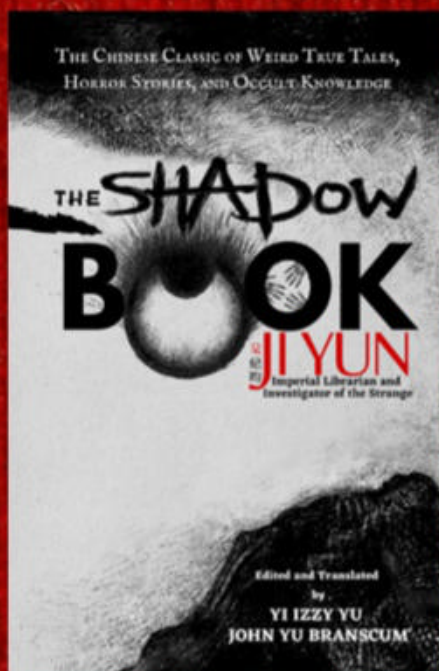
this time to use *zhiguai*'s promise to tell a true story as just an authorial strategy for framing a fictional account. So, he was walking the walk by writing up *zhiguai* in the way that he thought they should be written. [Finally], he was a true scholar and a true skeptic — as loath to explain away a supernatural phenomenon out of hand as to credulously accept one. This was due to his own virtue in part. But it is also due to a key Chinese cultural difference from the West, as the writer Lin Yutang and the philosopher Feng Youlan have pointed out. The Chinese are less either/or in their thinking. Ji Yun just took this a bit further than most."

Indeed, the sheer diversity of stories in *The Shadow Book of Ji Yun* (out June 5 from Empress Wu Books) is likely to shock some readers. There are tales of reincarnation, souls departing bodies and returning for final visits, cursed real estate, cannibalism, ill omens, haunted towns, the mysteries of death and mental illness, premonitions, karmic retribution, spirit conjuration via planchette divination, the literal haunting qualities of art, and even a supernatural detective story of sorts in "The Visitors," about the murders of four monks.

All of the entries undoubtedly benefit from the able translation provided by Yu and Branscum, an undertaking that approximated a form of collaboration.

"Ji Yun wrote in classical Chinese — which is dense and suggestive like poetry. It's also a pictographic language. A lot is said or implied through minimal language. ... Spare language doesn't get as dated. That said, we brought a lot to the work too, in the interest of showing what was so special about it to a contemporary, global readership. ... In this, we followed

what's called the 'Yan Fu method' of translation. It privileges conveying the meaning, nuance, and aesthetic effects of a source text over word-for-word transcription and allows for the subtle insertion of additional background and cultural information to communicate to new audiences. It was very important to us to take this approach. As writers who are also lovers of classical horror, we've long been frustrated that so many English translations mainly treat older work as historical or scholarly artifacts, and not as vibrant literature. We wanted to change that with our collection."



It only gets more complicated from there, because like Slate himself, his long-lost relations are not entirely human, and are in grave danger from some not-fully-understood outside forces. Slate's arrival to The Hill also coincides with a profound physical transformation he's due to undergo – the reason humans have always been so wary of him – but only if he can come to accept it and accept who he is. If not, he's fated to take his place among the Lost, and that might just be worse than anything.



Using sympathetic supernatural creatures to tell a coming-of-age tale is nothing new, nor is the well-worn trope of deep, dark family secrets returning to haunt everyone, but seeing them at play within a world and culture far from the typical North American reader's fictional buffet grants a certain freshness to it. In a way, much

of this is as new to us as it is to *Dispossessed's* main character, who is not only a stranger in a strange land, but also a stranger to his own past and his true self.

The novel never gets overly violent or gory, nor does it ever push the comfortable genre confines of its young adult label; its characters are as likely to do damage to each other as they are to succumb to those hunting them. This is sympathy-for-the-creatures territory, but that's not a bad thing. The monsters were always us anyway, and growing up can be the most beastly thing imaginable.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

THE WINGSPAN OF SEVERED HANDS

Joanna Koch

Weirdpunk Books

Cosmic and body horror collide with mind-bending results in *The Wingspan of Severed Hands*, a novella that feels like Lovecraftian fiction for the modern age. Perhaps this shouldn't be surprising given that author Joanna Koch's About the Author page positions them as a practitioner of literary horror and "surrealist trash" who also holds an MA in Contemplative Psychotherapy.

At its core, *Wingspan* is a tale of two scientists attempting to stop a mysterious, world-ravaging apocalypse by birthing a living weapon, but there is so much more at play here as the narrative weaves back around itself like an otherworldly serpent, taking us to strange, gory, violent, and transformative places.

In case it's not clear from that description, this is not a beach book. Indeed, it's also not a plane book or a bus book or even a waiting room book. It requires a distraction-free setting, as the scientific language interwoven with its poetic, literary style frequently demand the reader re-read sentences and paragraphs to absorb the full nuance and imagery and sheer what-the-fuckness of what's happening. With its nods to the works of Robert W. Chambers in the form of the story's adoption of The Yellow Sign and Ambrose Bierce via the use of his fictional city of Carcosa, and *Wingspan's* evolving narrative of birth, rebirth, death, transformation, and destruction, this is a cerebral journey that invites deeper introspection and investigation. Perhaps even a full front-to-back revisit. To be honest, it would not surprise this reviewer in the least if you took something wholly different away from your read. Such is its unusual, cryptic nature.

Wingspan is recommended to brave, patient, literate readers who like their horror weird, dense, graphic, and challenging, as this one easily checks all those boxes... and several more obscure ones as well.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



You'd think after a year of pandemic life we'd be a bit more desensitized to death and tragedy, and yet when the reaper raised his scythe for 53-year-old David G. Barnett, owner/operator of horror imprints [Necro Publications](#), [Bedlam Press](#), and [Weird West Books](#), in one of the most senseless ways imaginable (at the hands of a wrong-way driver on a Florida highway) on February 22, it was clear this was not the case. Every loss hurts. Every loss changes everything.

While Barnett suffered a number of health challenges, he didn't allow them to interfere with his dreams of writing and publishing. In an industry where publishers occasionally get up to nefarious business, he was one of the good ones, as evidenced in the numerous online memorials to him from friends and colleagues and the successful nearly 30-year run of his small press empire. I only met Barnett a couple times, many years ago, but his devotion to the genre was always apparent, not just in the way he spoke about it, but through the titles he released. Simply put, Barnett's imprints put out some seriously beautiful books by some incredibly talented and boundary-pushing authors, among them Edward Lee, Joe Lansdale, Jeffrey Thomas, Charlee Jacob (whose Necro novel *Dread in the Beast* won the Best Novel Stoker in 2005), Brian Hodge, Gerard Houarner, and Tom Piccirilli.

In a way, this compounds the tragedy because we must not only grieve a kind man taken far too soon, but the loss of a champion of the genre and a publishing channel that treated hardcore horror and weird westerns as art, with high-quality hardcover editions and more-affordable trade paperbacks and chapbooks. If you're a collector of scary stories, chances are you have some of Barnett's releases on your shelf. I own many.

The company's website is still online as of this writing, presumably still taking orders. It provides no formal statement, but it's hard to imagine the imprints surviving without their main man and driving force. That's a tragedy in its own right.

If the pandemic has reminded us of the fragility of life, Barnett's sudden passing hit it home. We simply can't take cool shit for granted, because there's no guarantee it will still be here tomorrow. So, if you've never laid hands on a Necro, Bedlam, or Weird West release or one of Barnett's own works of fiction (*Dead Souls*, *Tales of the Fallen*, *Neon Wings*) take a moment to correct that, because while saying goodbye is infinitely difficult, one of the most powerful ways we can honour those gone before us is to ensure their contribution to the genre is not forgotten.

R.I.P. Dave. Thanks for all the amazing books.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

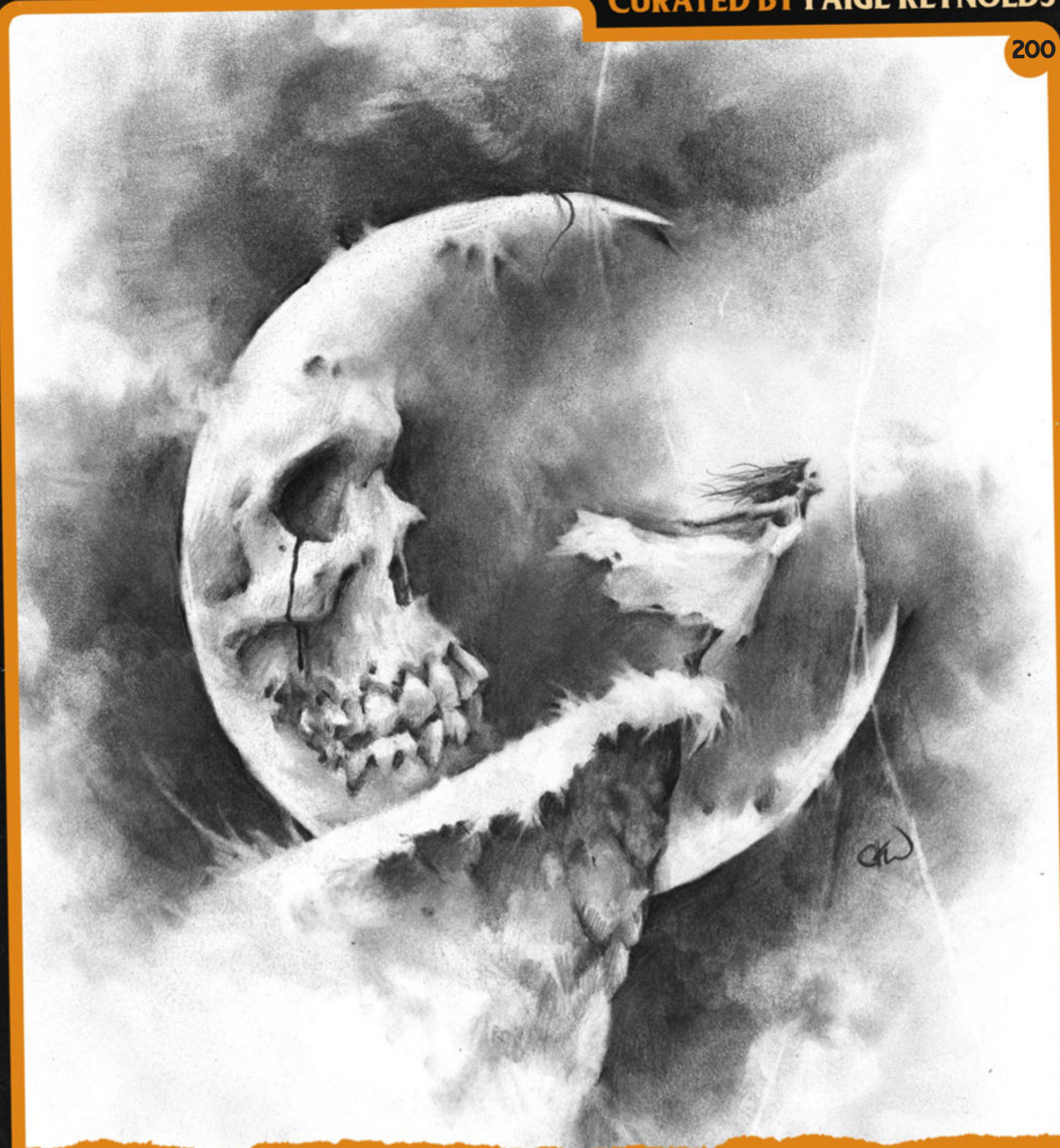
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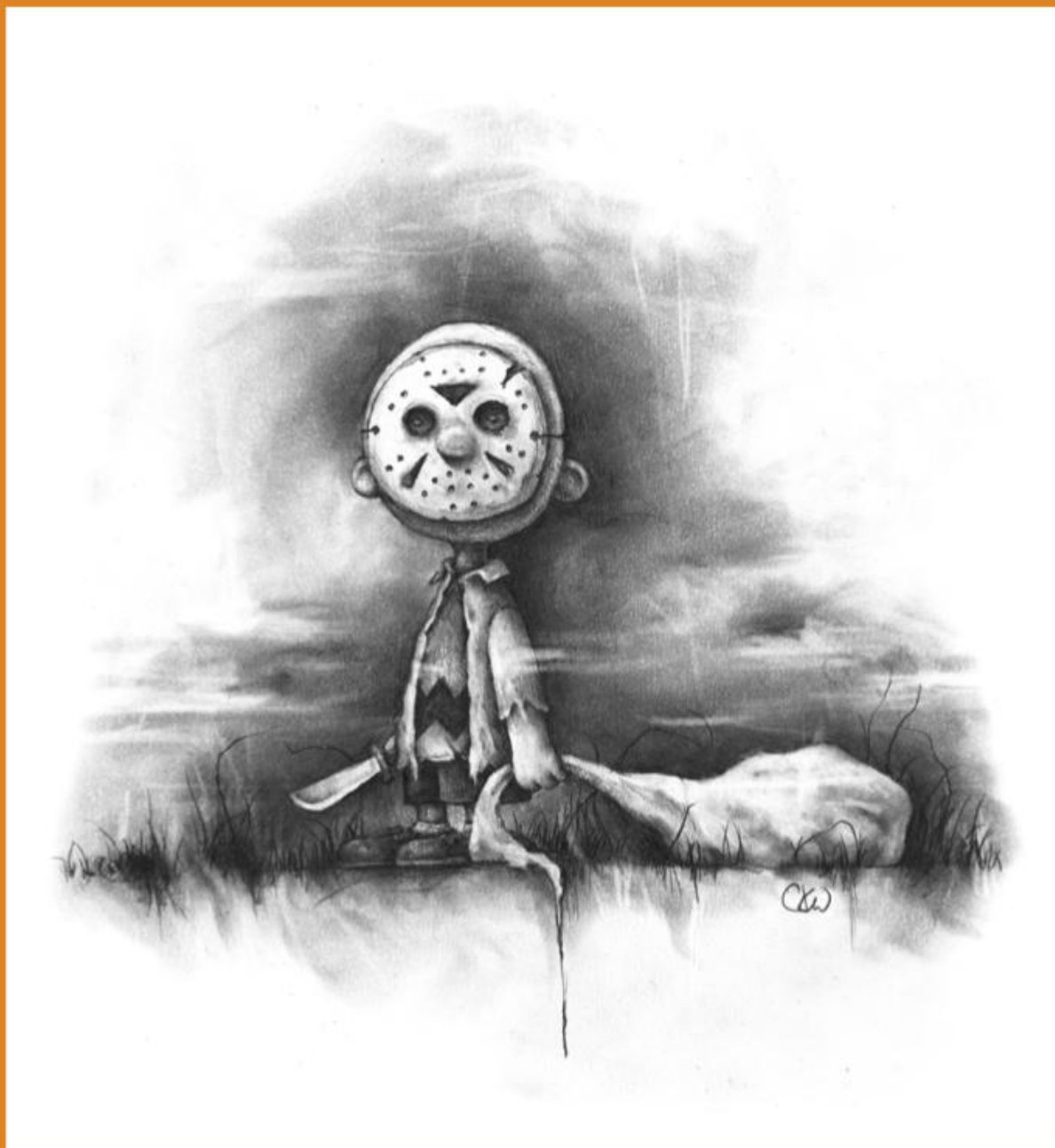
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HOMETOWN

"I grew up in a very small town that less than 100 people called home (depending on who died that week). After college I moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, to work as a graphic designer in the funeral industry and decided to stay."

WEAPON OF CHOICE

"My work always begins with gathering reference images and writing a short story that describes what I want the piece to capture. From there, I sketch out several quick concepts to get the highlights/shadows, movement, and overall composition planned out. Once everything falls into place, I start putting graphite onto paper for the final piece."

DEEDS

"A few years back I had the opportunity to illustrate *Corpse Cold: New American Folklore*, a collection of short stories set in a shared horror-verse. Containing twenty spooky tales and over 30 accompanying illustrations, the project taught me a lot about how to tell a story with not only words but imagery."

MY NIGHTMARE FUEL

"For me it is all about Halloween, campy '80s horror movies, and the *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* series. With each piece that I create I strive to capture those same fun (yet unsettling) feelings I remember as a child."

LAST WORDS

"Michelangelo once said, 'Forgiveness is divine, but never pay full price for late pizza.' Michelangelo the ninja turtle, that is; not the Renaissance artist. Sometimes we as artists burden ourselves to create world-changing art that will hang in museums for centuries to come, while forgetting why we picked up that pencil or brush for the first time: to have fun."

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A DUMPSTER DIVE INTO HORROR'S ODDS & CURIOS

DEVIL'S IN THE DETAILS

BY
STACIE
PONDER

IN 1987, WRITER/DIRECTOR DAVID A. PRIOR KICKED OFF THE (WOEFULLY SHORT) FITNESS SLASHER TREND WITH *KILLER WORKOUT*

(A.K.A. *AEROBI-CIDE*), wherein a mysterious someone murders the Lycra-clad patrons of Rhonda's Workout with an oversized novelty safety pin. The film features extended sequences of dubiously effective aerobics sessions, countless closeups of gyrating pelvises and jostling busts, fistfights between beefy men, a soundtrack crammed with fitness-related synthbops, and a body count in the double digits. In other words, *Killer Workout* is perfect.

In the film's opening sequence, rising model Valerie visits a tanning salon the night before her morning flight to Paris for a cover shoot that will be her big break. Unfortunately, in a sequence that surely made *Final Destination 3* say, "Well, we can do this better," Valerie's tanning bed malfunctions, engulfing her (and ultimately, her career) in flames. Five years later, health spa co-owner Rhonda Johnson is the very image of a late '80s woman with it all... but despite her apparent success, Rhonda is a woman on the edge. She has countless business tasks to attend to, such as "doing the books," but instead she must spend her time teaching classes when her employees show up late. She's also annoyed that her stalker Jimmy has asked her out yet again. Perhaps worst of all, someone is killing her clients. When a dead body is found stuffed in a locker, Rhonda tells the cops to make it quick, as their presence is bad for business. "Half my customers are being killed off," she exclaims, "and the other half is canceling their membership!"

She's right, dead customers are a big problem for the Workout. Any small business owner would be concerned. Towards the end of the film, however, it's revealed that Rhonda Johnson is actually tanning bed victim Valerie Johnson. She's been wearing a wig for

five years to cover her burned scalp, you see, so no one knew the truth of it. Rhonda grew so bitter under that wig, so incensed by the sight of her clients' beautiful bodies and natural hairdos that she suddenly began killing them. Ultimately, she frames Jimmy for the murders and shoots him in "self defense" before returning to the spa as a hero. Business starts booming so much that she takes out a full-page ad in the local paper.

But in the final, fourth wall-breaking shot of the film, Rhonda boldly brandishes her oversized novelty safety pin, smiling, to let the audience know that as Rhonda's Workout fills up with more beautiful bodies, oh yes, she will kill again... and again.

And that brings me to the detail I can't let go of, the one that has wrapped itself around me like a giant, cozy legwarmer: killing the clients of one's own fitness centre is an absolutely terrible business plan.

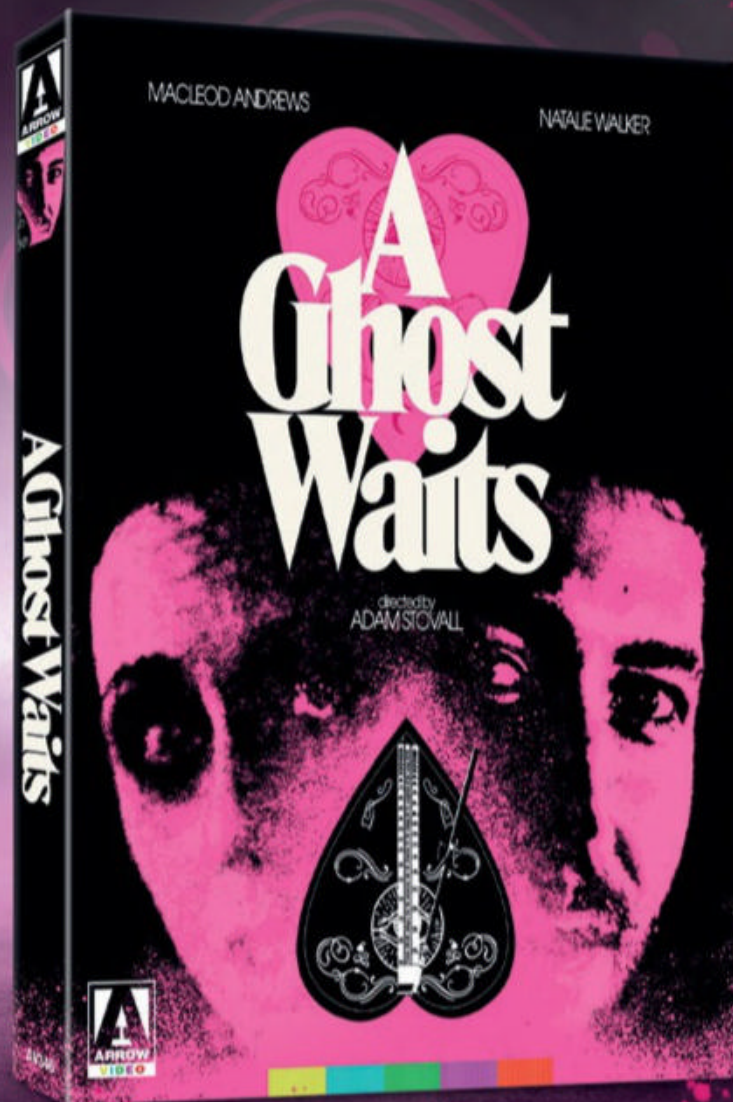
Rhonda has spent time and money on her career: she went to her local town hall, got a business license, and legally changed her first name (and only her first name, for some reason). She became a licensed fitness instructor. She invested in a series of wigs, and those aren't cheap. Only to kill off her customers, one of whom was the police's number one suspect? (It seems that Rhonda's crime plans aren't so great, either.) Why not kill the beautiful clients at a rival spa to satisfy her murder needs and drive business to the Workout? Why sabotage what she's worked so hard for?

You might say, "Because she is the killer in a stupid low-budget slasher flick," which is, of course, true. Still, applying but a modicum of common sense tells us that Rhonda's freewheeling, stabby ways can't continue forever. It's sad, but she'll eventually have to choose between her passions of being a small business owner and being a murderess. Sigh. Will women ever be able to truly have it all? 🖤





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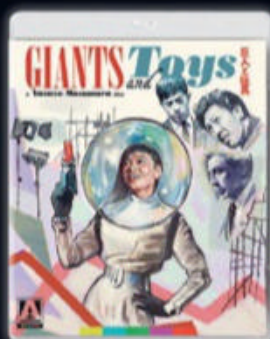
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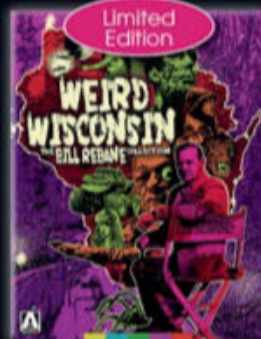
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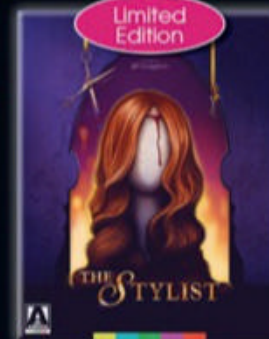
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REVIEWS BY ALEX DELLER, RACHEL REEVES
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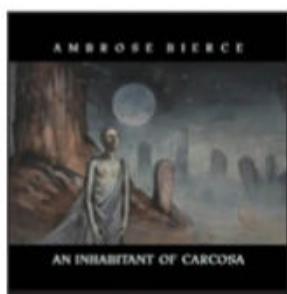


LUCKY

Jeremy Zuckerman

BURNING WITCHES RECORDS

There is nothing subtle about Natasha Kermani's film *Lucky*; bold and self-aware, its strong message and clever script required an equally strong sonic foundation. Lucky for *Lucky*, composer Jeremy Zuckerman delivers the goods in spades. Functioning as a crucial narrative element, Zuckerman's electronic-acoustic hybrid score provides an intimate glimpse into protagonist May's headspace. Haunting vocals and scratching, visceral strings relay her inner monologue while cold swells of digital sounds and icy synths create a hazy electronic soundscape. This diverse palette of sound and fusion of styles artfully pushes against traditional scoring conventions while providing an exciting and engaging listen. Even when distinct from the visuals, there's an incredibly effective emotional transference that occurs. Released by Burning Witches as a fourteen-track coloured LP, the release also features new artwork from Eileen Steinbach. Fresh and distinctive, Zuckerman's score is an undeniable modern classic and a beautifully encompassing stand-alone sonic experience. ☠️☠️☠️½ RR



SANTA SANGRE

Simon Boswell

FLICK RECORDS

Alejandro Jodorowsky's films work in a kind of surrealist hyperbole, re-

quiring similar music to match. For 1989's *Santa Sangre*, Simon Boswell emphasizes the sensational aspects of the movie's circus setting; he also finds ways to humanize the characters through music. At first glance, the sounds feel all over the map, keeping with Jodorowsky's storyline. The soundtrack employs calliope sounds for the circus, as well as acoustic guitar melodies that play throughout and help evoke the Mexican setting, such as on cues like "Triste" and "Holy Guitar." The contemplative, melancholic melodies are the album's standout elements, although Boswell's score also features more traditional horror beats, such as the nervy synth work on "Acid Revenge," or an almost minimalist approach on "Wingbeat." Originally issued by Cinevox in 1989, Flick Records' new edition will allow listeners another portal into this notably eclectic work. ☠️☠️☠️½ JS



THE GATE

Michael Hoenig

and J. Peter Robinson

TERROR-VISION

Another 1980s horror mainstay finds itself sonically preserved on wax with help from Terror-Vision, this time focusing on *The Gate*, from composing duo Michael Hoenig (*The Blob*) and J. Peter Robinson (*A Nightmare on Elm Street 5*). The pair, who had previously worked on cult film *The Wraith*, collaborate here to realize the subterranean realm and provide a sense of menace in the Canadian suburbs. This is done through a series of soundscapes, all created with a Synclavier, without relying on existing library samples. The result is impressive as a piece of sonic experimentation that adds some punch to the film. Listeners expecting a more thematic approach should note that the proceedings are more about

creating texture and ambiance, but if you're a fan, this is a solid memento of the cult film. ☠️☠️☠️½ JS



IMAGINAL SOUNDTRACKING VOL.2: THE DEMON

Various

PHANTOM LIMB

The second installment in Phantom Limb's *Imaginal Soundtracking* series continues the label's quest to re-examine lost or forgotten cinematic works. This edition sees five experimental musicians rescoring Kihachiro Kawamoto's 1972 stop-motion animation *The Demon* – a brief, eerily beautiful piece based on a tale from the Japanese Konjaku Monogatari anthology collection in which two hunters learn the tragic truth about their encounter with a fearsome demon. The assembled artists – including Ami Dang, Midori

Hirano, (a.k.a foodman), Sabiwa and Tori Kudo (a.k.a. Maher Shalal Hash Baz) – boast diverse resumes spanning experimental electronica, noise, contemporary composition, and psychedelia, and they banish the traditional shakuhachi and shamisen of the original soundtrack in favour of sitar, synths, piano, and playful field recordings. Each piece complements Kawamoto's deft puppetry while operating effectively outside the film's ghostly boundaries, and while *The Demon* might succinctly end with the line "How horrible!", this spectral collection is anything but. ☠️☠️☠️½ AD



PRETURBATOR

Lustful Sacraments

BLOOD MUSIC

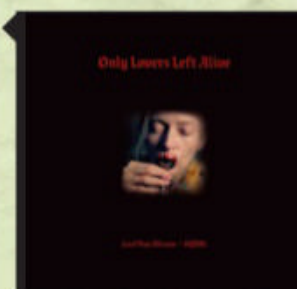
Having assisted at the birth of the neon mutant known as synthwave and then helped the slippery beast escape its grubby dungeon, we could have foreseen Perturbator's James

ONLY LOVERS LEFT ALIVE

Jozef Van Wissem & SQÜRL

SACRED BONES RECORDS

In 2013, Dutch lutenist Jozef Van Wissem and Jim Jarmusch's band SQÜRL won the Best Soundtrack award at Cannes for Jarmusch's dark, fantastical vampiric love story. Fusing gritty reverb-laden swirls of electric guitar with crisp lute and eclectic percussion, the score's unique embodiment of enduring love and timeless angst captured accolades from fans and critics alike. Further accentuating the musical undercurrent flowing through the film's narrative veins, vocals from Zola Jesus, Yasmin Hamdan, and Cults singer Madeline Follin effortlessly weave disparate tracks together into one incredible listening experience. Tragically out of print for years, Sacred Bones has done film music fans a huge favour with its recent vinyl reissue. Available in five stunning colour variants, each with their own level of extravagance and bonus features, there's something for everyone here. Proving itself as immutable as its cinematic partner, this is a classic score you won't want to sleep on. ☠️☠️☠️☠️ RR





PODCASTS FROM BEYOND



THE HISTORICAL NATIVES PODCAST

THEME: Indigenous Folklore

FREQUENCY: Sporadic

The Historical Natives Podcast is a product of Victoria, British Columbia, siblings and horror fans Josef Stafford and Mackenzie Taylor on a journey to connect with their roots. Their aim is to infuse the white-dominated genre with Indigenous voices and folklore – in particular, by exploring the most fearsome legends in Native culture. Often used as cautionary tales for the youth, these legends lean into the dark and gruesome, not shying away from murder, cannibalism, or suicide. While some creatures like the Sasquatch and Wendigo have already made their way into mainstream culture, the Wechuge, Walking Sam, Stick Indians, and Sharp-Elbows prove to be great additions to the horror lexicon. Each episode begins with a short history of a particular group of people before examining a specific creature or legend; newer episodes also include a scary story penned by Stafford, immersing the listener in a narrative with the creature in question. A talented writer, his words inspire true terror alongside a deeper understanding of the threat. Since the podcast is still fairly new, the production quality may not live up to pod-snob audio standards but listeners will undoubtedly benefit from getting in on the ground floor of an exciting new series. *The Historical Natives* website is also a multimedia resource for additional information on Indigenous culture, history, language, and current calls to action, making it a critical hub for a deeply important and underserved slice of the genre. ☠☠☠ **JESSICA BUCK**



THE EVOLUTION OF HORROR

THEME: Horror Movie Deep Dives

FREQUENCY: Weekly

Coming out of the gate in 2017 with obvious passion for the material, *The Evolution of Horror's* host, Mike Muncer, delivers a weekly podcast that dives deep into horror subgenres to see what they're made of. Each subgenre gets a devoted season, starting from its birth and moving, film by film, through its evolution to the present day. With season six recently wrapping up, the show has covered everything from folk horror to zombies, the occult, and more. Each season finishes with a well-rounded conclusion and a final exam for the host himself. Sharing the dissecting table, Muncer brings equally passionate guests to each episode, be they a returning co-host, such as writer and editor Kevin Lyons, or special guests like Lesley Manning, the director of *Ghostwatch*. What you get from these cinephiles is lively conversation that feels both effortless and focused. Together, the hosts search for why these films were made, what they might mean, and how they've affected audiences through time. With Mike Muncer's production background via the BBC, the finished product is also fairly slick; think of it as a kindred spirit to *The Projection Booth* podcast. If all that wasn't enough, there's also bonus episodes, a weekly Patreon episode, a blog, and even a YouTube channel. ☠☠☠

DENMAN C. ANDERSON

Kent harbouring grander plans, and this latest full-length certainly testifies to a broadening of scope and ambition. Those who got in at the ground floor will still find all those things that made them fall under Perturbator's woozy spell in the first place, with traces of John Carpenter, Cliff Martinez, and Vangelis remaining like signs of a hastily concealed crime. However, also now in the mix are motorik rhythms, glowering industrial electronics, and willow-the-wisp sightings of The Cure, The Sound, and Depeche Mode. From seething, sleazy tension and ecstatic shimmers through to smudgy come-downs there's a tremendous amount to unpack, all of which makes *Lustful Sacraments* a pulse-quicken leap into the unknown for artist and listener alike. ☠☠☠☠☠ **AD**

Album opener "Night Killer" has a propulsive hook and wailing vocals that sound somehow connected to the Fastway cuts from *Trick 'r Treat*; just as good is the power ballad closer, "Together We Were Dynamite," both of which feature Midnight Prophecy vocalist Craig Cairns, and which would mesh seamlessly into my grade eight dance back in '89 – mullet and all.

☠☠☠½ **JS**



MORTIFY

METAL

Grotesque Buzzsaw Defilement

HORROR PAIN GORE DEATH

If you're at a point in your life where you're buying releases with titles like *Grotesque Buzzsaw Defilement* then you're probably not one for subtlety; lucky for you, these Tokyo-based splatterers deliver grossness by the shovel. Formed by members of legendary Japanese act Coffins, Mortify buries itself in the guts of old-school grindcore (think Napalm Death, Terrorizer) while winking a milky eye at vintage Scandinavian death metal with its bone-gnawing guitar tone. While the sound is on point, there's definitely the sense that the band is having a good time as well as a gruesome one. This said, Mortify isn't messing around: the riffing is deadly and the sub-minute blasts hit hard, while the references dropped – including nods to *The Night Strangler*, Stanley Kubrick, and prolific Belgian act Agathocles – suggest a palette that extends well beyond blood-red and shit-brown. ☠☠☠½ **AD**



THE ANCIENT ORDER OF THE DROIDS

ELECTRONIC

My Little Slasher

MUSIKE DI DIABLE

Gerardo Preciado is no stranger to the world of faux soundtracks but with his latest effort, *My Little Slasher*, he has all but created an actual film: there's a finished script and a complete soundtrack to underline the imaginary movie. John Carpenter scores are clearly an influence, as Preciado emulates the loops and beats of a bygone era. While the actual product feels esoteric, you have to admire the attempt at one-upping previous efforts. This time around, the album gets a hefty jolt from two catchy metal tunes by The Atlantas.



MASTERS OF ORCHESTRAL HORROR, EDWARD DOUGLAS AND GAVIN GOSZKA OF MIDNIGHT SYNDICATE OBLITERATE THE LOCKDOWN...

SHADOWS COME TO LIFE

BY WILLIAM J. WRIGHT

NOW WELL INTO ITS THIRD DECADE AS HORROR'S PREMIER PURVEYOR OF GOTHIC SOUNDSCAPES, Midnight Syndicate has risen from the obscurity of creating spectral scores for non-existent horror movies, to revolutionizing the haunted attraction industry with its signature sound – a combination of hypnotic melodies and terrifying sound effects. In doing so, the music of composers Edward Douglas and Gavin Goszka has become a mainstay at such world-famous haunts as Universal Studios' Halloween Horror Nights and Cedar Point's HalloWeekends. With more than 22 albums to their credit, the duo is poised to release something entirely new – an aural onslaught of its concert performances (their first such release) titled *Live Shadows*, out this summer from Linfaldia Records/Entity Productions, Inc. Considering their voluminous back catalog of studio releases, one might think that live albums would have been a semi-regular occurrence since the band's debut in 1997 but as they explain, live Midnight Syndicate events have always been unusually localized.

"We're very fortunate to have supporters around the globe," Douglas tells *Rue Morgue*. "However, the Midnight Syndicate Live! show, because of logistics, has only been performed at the Cedar Point Amusement Park in Sandusky, Ohio. As a result, the smallest fraction of one percent of the Midnight Syndicate fanbase has ever seen the show. *Live Shadows* is an opportunity for everyone to hear Midnight Syndicate songs performed live for the first time."

"Since we weren't able to perform at Cedar Point last year, it just seemed like the perfect time," adds Goszka, noting that live music fans in lockdown might especially appreciate a concert sound. "We're not able to do an actual live show, but we've got these recordings. It's as good a substitute as you can get."

Naturally, *Live Shadows* features many Midnight Syndicate favourites, including terrifying new renditions of "Conspiracy of Shadows" and "Noctem Aeternus," as well as such rarities as "Nightstalker" from the band's long out-of-print 1998 LP *Born of the Night*, but the new album also holds a few surprises for even the most dedicated fans.

"[Many of the songs] involve different arrangements," Douglas reveals. "The album also includes songs that Gavin and I wrote specifically for the show that have never been released on any Midnight Syndicate album before."

"The show really had its own set of demands, and we built the arrangements with that in mind," says Goszka. "Some songs, by nature, end up getting shortened. There's some things that definitely got added to highlight what's going on onstage. We took the songs that we wanted to use and kind of said, 'Okay, what does the show need from this song?' and adapted it based on that."

The gargantuan task of selecting songs for the live show fell to Goszka, who looked to an unlikely source for guidance.

"I took a bit of inspiration from Pearl Jam, because they're kind of known for not doing the same set [twice]," he says. "They'll pull album tracks, deep cuts, B-sides – you never know what you're going to hear at one of their concerts, and I love that! As a fan, if you go to one of our shows, it would be great to have no expectations. You might hear a song that you recognize or one that you expect us to play. You might hear something that you would never expect us to play. It keeps things exciting for us and the audience."

Along with the music, *Live Shadows* will also give fans a peek at the group's eye-popping multimedia live show by including a number of music videos from performances at Cedar Point.

"Putting out the music videos along with the album is so important to us," stresses Douglas. "The plan is to release one music video for each of the

four years that we've done the show. What that's really going to do is allow all the fans a chance not only to hear what Midnight Syndicate songs sound like live, but to catch a glimpse into the live shows."

Although plans for more live performances in 2021 remain up in the air due to the ongoing pandemic, Midnight Syndicate is nonetheless excited about its future both on stage and in the studio.

"There are so many themes that we haven't explored with Midnight Syndicate yet," Douglas muses. "The possibilities are endless." 🧛



PLAY DEAD



NOW PLAYING > DOOMED FROM THE START BY EVAN MILLAR

Ask a horror gamer what it is that sets the video game format over all others and there's the obvious answer – games add interactivity to the mix, and the difference between watching someone creep around a haunted mansion and actually controlling each step is a substantial one. But what non-gamers might not realize is that this sense of interactivity extends even further into the wider relationship between gamers and developers, which explains (in part) why gaming has one of the most vocal and rabid fanbases of any pop culture media.

Take my earliest example of horror gaming: it might sound like fanboy hyperbole, but 1993's *DOOM* made me the person I am today. Growing up, I had access to movie theatres, recreation centres, and malls, but my preferred entertainment was always waiting at home in the form of snarling pixelated demons who longed to rip and tear into my flesh. I've played hundreds of games in the course of my life, but I can still close my eyes and see *DOOM*'s first level in vivid detail: the blue floor with a mutilated corpse on direct display; the zombified soldiers haunting a tangled blue web of dense circuitry; the red-eyed imp who hurls slow-moving fireballs as I cross a narrow catwalk surrounded by pulsing green acid.

And the game wasn't even new when I got into it – I'd heard it talked about in hushed tones by my stepdad, how it took over his life while he was in college, gluing him to his monitor in the early hours of the morning. By then, I was already familiar with the genre that *DOOM* and id Software's previous title *Wolfenstein 3D* had popularized: the FPS, or first-person shooter. Games like *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark* for the Nintendo 64 were already sleepover staples for my friends and I thanks to their four-player local multiplayer mayhem.

DOOM, however, hit different. Just like my stepdad in college, I spent innumerable hours seated at my dusty old desktop running and gunning in *DOOM*'s maze-like levels. Equally fun in both shorter or longer sessions, its gory gameplay always satisfied, even when I'd completed the entire story dozens of times; be it to detonate demons into piles of gooey red entrails from a well-timed shot to an explosive barrel, or messily carve them in two with a chainsaw as they cry out in pain, these isolated moments of



intense horror provided a hit of dopamine to the brain. The replayability factor was also no doubt a result of the game's hidden discoverable secrets, adjustable difficulty levels, and wide range of weapon choices, though *DOOM*'s appeal for me went beyond the game itself.

What truly cemented it as a staple of my identity as a gamer was that it served as my introduction to the world of multiplayer deathmatches and modding – custom user-made content that gave the game an entirely fresh coat of bloody entrails. Its developer, id Software, utilized a D.I.Y. approach to the game's design, one that allowed the fanbase to rework existing assets with the same set of tools its creators used to make *DOOM* in the first place. Uncommon at the

time, it laid the groundwork for many user-generated horror modifications ("mods") such as *Unreal Tournament 2004*'s mod *Killing Floor*, *Half-Life*'s mod *Cry of Fear*, and countless others since. Nearly 30 years later, *DOOM* continues to live on through collaboration with its players.

I might be preaching to the choir when it comes to passionate horror fans who love John Carpenter's *Halloween* the way that I love *DOOM*: I've spent thousands of hours playing, studying, and living the game; I've considered getting its enemies tattooed on my body; I own the game on nearly every console it's been ported to, PC and Mac re-releases included; and I'll sing its bloody praises to anyone who will listen.



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EVERYONE KNOWS THAT SEQUELS ARE A CASE OF DIMINISHING RETURNS, BUT WHICH ONE HOLDS THE DUBIOUS DISTINCTION OF BEING THE BEST WORST? TWO WRITERS ENTER THE RING TO SETTLE IT ONCE AND FOR ALL...

WHAT IS THE BEST WORST HORROR MOVIE SEQUEL EVER MADE?

STACIE PONDER

*Amityville Horror:
The Evil Escapes*

JON STEFFENS

*Howling II:
Your Sister is a Werewolf*

UNDoubtedly the best worst sequel of forever is the craptacular 1989 made-for-TV movie *Amityville Horror: The Evil Escapes*, a movie so mind-bogglingly, wonderfully stupid that it defies the very fabric of reality.

In it, a group of priests performs an exorcism on the Long Island home abandoned in the night by George and Kathy Lutz, but the evil within is not easily vanquished. Said evil, which turns out to be roughly the size of a pea, travels from a wall socket through a power cord to lodge itself inside a truly hideous floor lamp. This cursed *objet de Lutz* is bought at a yard sale and shipped off to California, whereupon it wreaks havoc on Patty Duke's family. The lamp is able to supernaturally inspire a chainsaw to run on its own accord, leading to the wanton destruction of Grandma Duke's collection of jelly jars and unpainted ceramics. In another sequence, an electric kettle gets really hot. A bird is roasted in a toaster oven. There is no end to the depravity of this possessed floor lamp!

Patty Duke herself must face off against the lamp after her daughter becomes convinced that the spirit of her dead father lives within it. A demon face appears in the lamp's bulb and eventually the movie ends as all movies – horror or otherwise – should end: with a possessed floor lamp exploding after it's heaved off a cliff by a veteran actress.

Calling *The Evil Escapes* a nonsensical mess is generous, but that mess is a goddamn delight to watch from beginning to end. It feels like a fever dream at times – particularly when the lamp lurks behind a corner ominously. It's a movie about a possessed floor lamp and it's meant to be taken seriously. Someone wrote this script and dozens of others signed off on it. Money was spent. Patty Duke agreed to be on set in the morning. It got made, somehow, and I got to watch it. Sometimes life is real good. 🐾

ANYONE CAN MAKE A SHITTY SEQUEL TO A GREAT HORROR MOVIE, BUT CRAFTING A SEQUEL SO BAD IT PROJECTILE VOMITS INTO THE FACE OF THE ORIGINAL, WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY BEING AN INFINITELY REWATCHABLE SLICE OF ENTERTAINMENT? That takes a stroke of genius. With the batshit-insane *Howling II: Your Sister is a Werewolf*, director Philippe Mora shows us he might as well be the Kubrick of utter crap.

Despite a steep drop-off in quality from the first film in nearly every conceivable department, this lump of lycanthropic lunacy is injected with a frenetic sense of fun. Sure, the acting is more wooden than the wicker man (except for the inimitable Christopher Lee, who is great even when he's phoning it in), the story is complete nonsense, and the werewolves are far less effective than those seen in the original (aside from coming off as an afterthought, they differ wildly in appearance from the beasts created by Rob Bottin et al.), but this thing has a lot going for it.

To start, the suitably spooky Czech locations (passing for Transylvania, duh) are the perfect backdrop for a fright flick centred around one of the classic monsters, and new wave act Babel provides a catchy theme for the film with the gloriously goth-y song "The Howling." Add to that a performance from aforementioned genre legend Lee as occult investigator Stefan Crosscoe (the scene in which he dons a pair of white shades to blend in at a punk club is fucking gold), and copious amounts of flesh on display from Sybil Danning, who heaves her chest almost as well

as she chews the scenery in her role as Stirba the werewolf queen, and you've got yourself a recipe that propels this celluloid stinker from the depths of bad cinema to its lofty perch among the best bad sequels of the '80s horror boom. Hold your nose, this dog is ripe! 🐾



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